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AUTHOR Kroth, Roger; Krehbiel, Roberta
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ABSTRACT

This module (part of a series of 24 modules) is on philosophies, competencies, and skills that will aid the teacher in communicating with parents. The genesis of these materials is in the 10 "clusters of capabilities," outlined in the paper, "A Common Body of Practice for Teachers: The Challenge of Public Law 94-142 to Teacher Education." These clusters form the proposed core of professional knowledge needed by teachers in the future. The module is to be used by teacher educators to reexamine and enhance their current practice in preparing classroom teachers to work competently and comfortably with children who have a wide range of individual needs. The module includes objectives, scales for assessing the degree to which the identified knowledge and practices are prevalent in an existing teacher education program, and self-assessment test items. Topics discussed in this module include a rationale for parent/teacher interaction, a mirror model of parental involvement, listening skills, conferencing skills, information-sharing strategies, and parent involvement groups. A bibliography and articles are included on parental involvement with the schools, and improving conferences with parents of exceptional children. (JD)

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PARENT - TEACHER INTERACTION

PREPARED BY

ROGER KROTH

ROBERTA KREHBIEL

REVIEWED BY

RICHARD SIMPSON

MARTHA ZIEGLER

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Extending the Challenge:
Working Together a Common Body of Practice for Teachers

Concerned educators have always wrestled with issues of excellence and professional development. It is argued in the paper, "A Common Body of Practice for Teachers: The Challenge of Public Law 94-142 to Teacher Education,"* that the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 provides the necessary impetus for a concerted reexamination of teacher education. Further, it is argued that this reexamination should enhance the process of establishing a body of knowledge common to the members of the teaching profession. The paper continues, then, by outlining clusters of capabilities that may be included in the common body of knowledge. These clusters of capabilities provide the basis for the following materials.

The materials are oriented toward assessment and development. First, the various components, rating scales, self-assessments, sets of objectives, and respective rationale and knowledge bases are designed to enable teacher educators to assess current practice relative to the knowledge, skills, and commitments outlined in the aforementioned paper. The assessment is conducted not necessarily to determine the worthiness of a program or practice, but rather to reexamine current practice in order to articulate essential common elements of teacher education. In effect then, the "challenge" paper and the ensuing materials incite further discussion regarding a common body of practice for teachers.

Second, and closely aligned to assessment, is the developmental perspective offered by these materials. The assessment process allows the user to view current practice on a developmental continuum. Therefore, desired or more appropriate practice is readily identifiable. On another,

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*Published by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Washington, D.C., 1980 ($5.50).

perhaps more important dimension, the "challenge" paper and these materials focus discussion on preservice teacher education. In making decisions regarding a common body of practice, it is essential that specific knowledge, skill and commitment be acquired at the preservice level. It is also essential that other additional specific knowledge, skill, and commitment be acquired as a teacher is inducted into the profession and matures with years of experience. Differentiating among these levels of professional development is paramount. These materials can be used in forums in which focused discussion will explicate better the necessary elements of preservice teacher education. This explication will then allow more productive discourse on the necessary capabilities of beginning teachers and the necessary capabilities of experienced teachers.

In brief, this work is an effort to capitalize on the creative ferment of the teaching profession in striving toward excellence and professional development. The work is to be viewed as evolutionary and formative. Contributions from our colleagues are heartily welcomed.

This paper presents one module in a series of resource materials which are designed for use by teacher educators. The genesis of these materials is in the ten "clusters of capabilities," outlined in the paper, "A Common Body of Practice for Teachers: The Challenge of Public Law 94-142 To Teacher Education," which form the proposed core of professional knowledge needed by professional teachers who will practice in the world of tomorrow. The resource materials are to be used by teacher educators to reexamine and enhance their current practice in preparing classroom teachers to work competently and comfortably with children who have a wide range of individual needs. Each module provides further elaboration of a specified "cluster of capabilities"--in this case, preparing teachers to work with parents.

INTRODUCTION

This module is designed as a resource for teacher trainers interested in preparing teachers for effective interaction with parents. Support for including this area in teacher training curricula comes from research that shows parents and families play an important role in the educational growth, mental health and overall development of children.

This module outlines philosophy, competencies, and skills that will aid the teacher in communicating with parents. Because of the authors' special education background, early units are devoted to principles found important to successful intervention with parents of handicapped children. It is felt however, that the strategies offered in subsequent units will be valuable to all educators.

Teachers trained in special education are aware of the various exceptionalities but tend to become expert in one or two areas. Some of the units in this module are prefaced by a suggestion that students review the literature in their preferred areas relevant to each unit. It is also suggested that personal experience be incorporated to either support or refute the literature.

Teacher trainers using this module with regular teachers will find their students interested in diverse disciplines including sociology, psychology, and anthropology. Various approaches should be encouraged at each unit level.

In order to further increase awareness of parent-teacher interaction the teacher trainer should encourage additional knowledge in the area of single parenting, foster parenting, step parenting, cultural diversity, and the impact of socio-economical status and educational level.

Acknowledgements

Institute for Parent Involvement

There are several references to Strategies for Effective Parent-Teacher Interaction in this module. The development of the guide or handbook was supported by funds from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, Department of Health, Education and Welfare (Grant No. GOO-7801425), April, 1980. Professional consultants to the guide in addition to Roger Kroth, Director and Harriet Otteni, Coordinator, include: Ray Dembinski, Northern Illinois University; Denzil Edge, University of Louisville; Kay Hartwell, Arizona State University; Jennifer Olson, University of Idaho; Richard Simpson, University of Kansas; Bill Wagonseller, University of Nevada at Las Vegas; Herman Saettler, BEH, U.S. Office of Education; George Hagerty, BEH, U.S. Office of Education; and David Darling, Dean, UNM College of Education.

Staff contributors include: Paula Parks, Parent Involvement Center, Albuquerque; Meave Stevens, University of New Mexico; Jeronimo Dominguez, University of New Mexico; Lauren Moss, University of New Mexico; Lu Ellen Doty, University of Louisville; Joe Sievert, University of New Mexico; Pat Putnam, University of New Mexico; and Bobbye Krehbiel, University of New Mexico.

Institutes for training in the area (usually a week long session) continue to be held across the country. Professionals interested in the institute should contact: Professor Kroth, Department of Special Education, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131.

Special Appreciation

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CONTENTS

Within this module are the following components:

Set of Objectives vii

The objectives focus on the teacher educator rather than on a student (preservice teacher). The objectives identify what can be expected as a result of working through the materials. The objectives which apply to teachers are also identified. They are statements about skills, knowledge and attitudes which should be part of the "common body of practice" of all teachers.

Rating Scales viii

Scales are included by which a teacher educator could, in a cursory way, assess the degree to which the knowledge and practices identified in this module are prevalent in the existing teacher-training program. The rating scales also provide a catalyst for further thinking in each area.

Self-Assessment ix

Specific test items were developed to determine a user's working knowledge of the major concepts and principles in each subtopic. The self-assessment may be used as a pre-assessment to determine whether one would find it worthwhile to go through the module, or as a self-check after the materials have been worked through. The self-assessment items also can serve as examples of mastery test questions for students.

Rationale and Knowledge Base

This section outlines the knowledge base and empirical support for the selected topics on parent-teacher interaction. The more salient concepts and strategies are reviewed. Simulations/activities and questions have been integrated with the rationale and knowledge base. Major units in this section include:

1. Rationale for Parent/Teacher Interaction 1
2. Mirror Model of Parental Involvement - Family. 10
3. Values 45
4. Listening Skills 58
5. Conferencing Skills 74
6. Information Sharing Strategies 88
7. Parent Involvement Groups 104
Bibliography. Unit references and a partial bibliography of important books, articles and materials is included after each unit. In addition, four useful readings related to Parent/Teacher interaction are annotated. . . .139
Articles. Two articles (reproduced with authors' permission) accompany the aforementioned components. The articles support and expand on the knowledge base.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the module are:

1. To introduce the reader to the rationale for parent involvement in schools and for interaction with teachers.

2. To introduce the reader to a model which suggests levels of parent and teacher involvement.

3. To make the reader aware of the dynamics that may be prevalent in families with a handicapped child; that families are unique and not homogeneous.

4. To make the reader aware of the strengths and coping strategies most parents have so that these can be a basis for help and support.

5. To make the reader aware of his/her own values and expectations so as to interact more realistically with other adults and children.

6. To introduce the reader to techniques of listening, conferencing, group work and other ways of interacting with parents.

REASONABLE OBJECTIVES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Reasonable objectives for a teacher education program include:

1. Preparing teachers who understand the role and importance of parents in the education process.

2. Preparing teachers who are knowledgeable of and sensitive to family dynamics.

3. Preparing teachers who are aware of and sensitive to their own values regarding parents, particularly parents of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, who have special problems, who have different attitudes toward schools, who have handicapped children.

4. Preparing teachers who are skillful at techniques that increase and improve parent-teacher interactions.

RATING SCALE FOR THE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM

Check the level that best describes your present teacher education program in the area of parent-teacher interaction.

_____ 1. Students receive no systematic instruction for interacting with parents.

_____ 2. Students receive instruction related to working with families (e.g. family dynamics, values clarification, active listening).

_____ 3. Students receive specific instruction regarding involvement with parents but are taught few specific skills.

_____ 4. Students are taught specific ways that parent-teacher interactions can be improved and utilized to enhance the development of students.

_____ 5. Students receive instruction and practice in ways of improving and utilizing parent-teacher interactions to enhance the development of students, including values clarification, active listening, dealing with aggressive parents, conferencing skills, and planning and carrying through a wide range of interventions from daily reporting systems to workshops and groups.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

As a check of your familiarity with the material in this module, try the following:

1. List some of the reasons parent/teacher interactions have become a major area of concern in todays educational structure.

2. The Mirror Model (Unit 2) considers various levels of parent involvement with their child's school. Prior to working with Unit 2 of this module try to list four levels of <u>needs</u> and four levels of <u>strengths</u> that parents might be expected to have.

3. A general feeling for the family dynamics of families with an exceptional child is considered a priority in this module. Briefly write out a few of your thoughts concerning possible models of family dynamics of exceptional children.

4. Briefly discuss the rationale for including a unit on personal values in a module on parent/teacher interaction.

5. List some tips you would give to teachers to help them deal with aggressive parents.

6. Discuss Bell's Bidirectional Theory of parent/child interaction.

7. Various authors allude to coping mechanisms that parents of handicapped children use. What are some of them and are they data based?

8. Identify the characteristics of an active listener.

9. Present an outline or a structure for a typical parent/teacher conference. Identify the major components.

10. Identify a variety of parent involvement activities that do not require face to face interaction.

11. What justification is there for parent involvement from legal, educational and ethical points of view.

True or False

_____ 1. Most schools have some level of parent involvement.

_____ 2. About 50% of the school age children will live in a single parent family before they graduate or leave school.

_____ 3. Dembinski and Mauser found that most parents felt they got clear information from psychologists.

_____ 4. Most teacher training institutions have coursework in parent/teacher interaction.

_____ 5. The value and use of daily or weekly reporting systems is well documented.

_____ 6. Most teachers use frequent reporting strategies.

_____ 7. Telephones have been used to increase children's academic performance.

_____ 8. The majority of school age children will have a parent at home when school is out for the day.

_____ 9. In general, parents regard their child's teacher as one of the best sources for information and support.

_____10. Most parents with exceptional children have parent groups available to them.

_____11. There are a number of parent education group type programs commercially prepared.

UNIT 1

RATIONALE FOR PARENT/TEACHER INTERACTION

Preparation: Students should expand the bibliography provided at the end of this unit by:

1. Summarizing new literature since this publication.
2. Briefly reviewing literature which describes the opinion of principals, administrators, and school psychologists or counselors toward the extent teachers and school can and should become involved with parents.
3. Regular teachers should extend the bibliography with references relevant to interaction with parents of non-handicapped children.

Rationale

The American family is changing rapidly. The 1930 decennial census figures in the U.S. show that of about 63 million children, 19% are living with one parent, usually the mother. Bronfenbrenner (1977) reports that from 1948 to 1974 there was a rapid increase in the number of working mothers, a dissociation with the extended family and an increase in the amount of time children spend with peers. Families are more mobile. What happens to children when family structure changes? Consider, for example, the restructuring when children are uprooted and moved, forced to change friends, reorganize, and forced to discontinue activities. Or consider changes that occur when increased economic stress forces the single parent or both parents into the workforce. The latter often means that children may be cared for by people outside the family where methods of child-rearing, expectations, and discipline are not consistent with those of the parents.

Possibly for the same economic reasons, willing parents in need of child rearing tips are unable to budget time and/or finances to secure private help. This would suggest that schools can become a great force in mental health and support for parents.

Along with the figures that show a change in the basic structure of families are the startling statistics on child mistreatment. According to the National Study on Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting (1979), child mistreatment increased by 24% between 1976 and 1977. A summary report regarding public agencies found, "Few public social service agencies provide services directed toward prevention, or reaching a family before internal problems explode into a crises." (HEW, 1977). It is reasonable that schools could become a major primary prevention source due to their community location and possibilities for direct parental contact. Teachers, counselors, and administrators are in a prime position to support parents. They are aware of the community and therefore community values and idiosyncracies. They have the potential to come into contact with all parents of children required by law to attend school. From monthly newsletters to extensive parent workshops the possibilities are endless.

The first priority of any teacher who decides to interact more than minimally with parents (i.e. more than report card progress conferences) should be concern for the benefits to the child. That is, as a result of any contact made with parents or siblings there should be concurrent positive results in the child's self-concept, competence and feelings of security. This should be the goal even if the interaction is on a very low level.

There is ample evidence to show that parents can be trained to interact effectively with their child. Parents have been taught techniques of active listening and problem solving (Gordon, 1975; Linkmeyer & Carlson, 1973) and to act as filial therapists (Guerney, 1969). Siblings have also been trained as "therapists" (Baker, 1976; Weinrott, 1974). Parents have been trained as observers (Wilson, McVeigh, McMahon,

Bauer, & Richardson, 1976) and to increase language development (e.g., Barbrack & Horton, 1970) and intellectual development (see Bronfrenbrenner, 1974). There is extensive literature that demonstrates successful training of parents as behavioral change agents (Becker, 1971; Berkowitz & Graziano, 1972; O'Dell, 1974; Patterson, 1976).

To insure that children (especially exceptional children) are receiving maximum benefits from the alteration in the nature of the interaction between themselves and their parents, teachers must use their skills and expertise to monitor behavior and feelings. Formal instruments also have been used effectively. One study that measured the effects of parent group education on children was reported by Cox and Matthews (1977). Two assessment instruments were used: The Behavior Rating Form (Coopersmith, 1967) and the Behavior Coding Categories (Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 1973). Results supported the assumption that for this particular sample, parental knowledge of good family relationships lead to their own children's positive relationship skills. In another study, Kinard (1974) found that Head Start children had higher achievement scores if their parents were involved with the program.

Support for the effectiveness of family involvement also comes from research studies which have shown that family relations can be improved (Downing, 1971; Neman, McCann, Ross, Menolascino, & Heal, 1977; Patterson, 1976). Training groups can provide needed social support (Colman, Dougher, & Tanner, 1976; Tavormina, Hampson, & Luscomb, 1976) as well as a place to air and discuss common problems (Schonell & Watts, 1956).

Stanhope and Bell (1979) discussed several aspects of parent involvement yet to be resolved through research. One concern is generalization. How well do families continue to apply what they've learned? Can they apply the skills in all situations and consistently to all

behaviors? Another area for research is the influence of parental attitudes and personality (Gardner, 1976) and whether or not attitudes actually change as a result of involvement or training. Stanhope and Bell (1979) summarized some cautions regarding possible negative side effects where parent training could lead to overinvolvement with certain handicapped children to the exclusion of spouse and other siblings (Bentovim, 1972). Also Bernal and North (1978) suggest that if parents try to change very complex behaviors, they may have increased problems. Finally, the complicated patterns that result when handicapped children actually induce parents to behave in distinctive manners warrant attention and consideration.

Thus far this discussion has centered more on a rationale for parental involvement at the most extensive levels (see The Mirror Model, Unit 2). Although minimal involvement techniques have not been subject to vigorous research, preliminary reports have indicated such programs as daily reporting systems are valuable (Dougherty & Dougherty, 1977). In addition, Duncan and Fitzgerald (1969) found a reduction in the number of discipline problems and number of days absent, and improved grades for junior high students when a parent conference was held prior to the beginning of school. Finally some of the best rationale comes from the fact that teachers, through their support of parents, can influence each parent's perspective of their child. Regarding the exceptional child, Bruno Bettelheim (1966) put the importance of this in the following manner:

> Children can learn to live with a disability, but they cannot live well without the conviction that their parents find them utterably loveable . . . If parents, knowing about their child's defect, love him now, he can believe that others will love him in the future.

Through their extensive work with parents, Kroth, Otteni, and

Parks (in press) have gone so far as to state, "The primary responsibility for interacting with parents cannot be abrogated or assigned to parent coalitions, child advocacy groups, or medical and allied professions. No other group of people has the frequent and sustained contact with parents that teachers do." In addition, teachers are viewed in a much more positive light than professionals in other service areas (Seligman, 1979). Extensive training is necessary if teachers are going to become comfortable in interacting with parents (O'Keefe, 1975) and changing negative attitudes into positive workable perceptions regarding parent involvement (Dominguez, 1982; Karnes, 1977).

Despite the fact that there is ample evidence to support extensive parent-teacher interaction programs (all cautions considered) training is one component frequently missing from training programs (Rutherford & Edgar, 1979). This module is designed to provide training in the needed teacher competencies known to date.

UNIT 1 - RATIONALE

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UNIT 1 - RATIONALE

Suggested Reading

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*Article included with this module.

UNIT 2

MIRROR MODEL OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

FAMILY DYNAMICS

Preparation: Students should expand and share information relevant to family structure, roles, and dynamics.

1. Students should consider where they feel their energies could be expended on the Mirror Model. Thought should be given to previous contact they have had with parents. Would these parents have increased their involvement had the opportunity been provided?
2. Students should compile information on methods and materials currently in use for:
   A. Development of handbooks, newsletters, weekly reporting systems, home visits (see for example, Unit 6).
   B. Parent education groups (see for example, Unit 7).
   C. Training parents as classroom volunteers, advocates, support group leaders.

Introduction

An analysis of family structures indicates that educators will have to consider a variety of ways of communicating with parents. For instance, the Superintendent of the Houston Public Schools reported that only about 7% to 17% of the children had a family structure with the father working and the mother staying at home, over 70% of the children had working parent(s), and over 50% of the children will have lived with a single parent by the age of 15. To hold conferences during the school day may mean that a parent will have to take time from work or not be able to

come. Evening meetings may be poorly attended because parents are tired or they may be doing household chores, or they may prefer to spend the time with their children. Faced with the need to keep parents informed and complex family structures which makes communication difficult, educators will be challenged to design appropriate strategies for interaction.

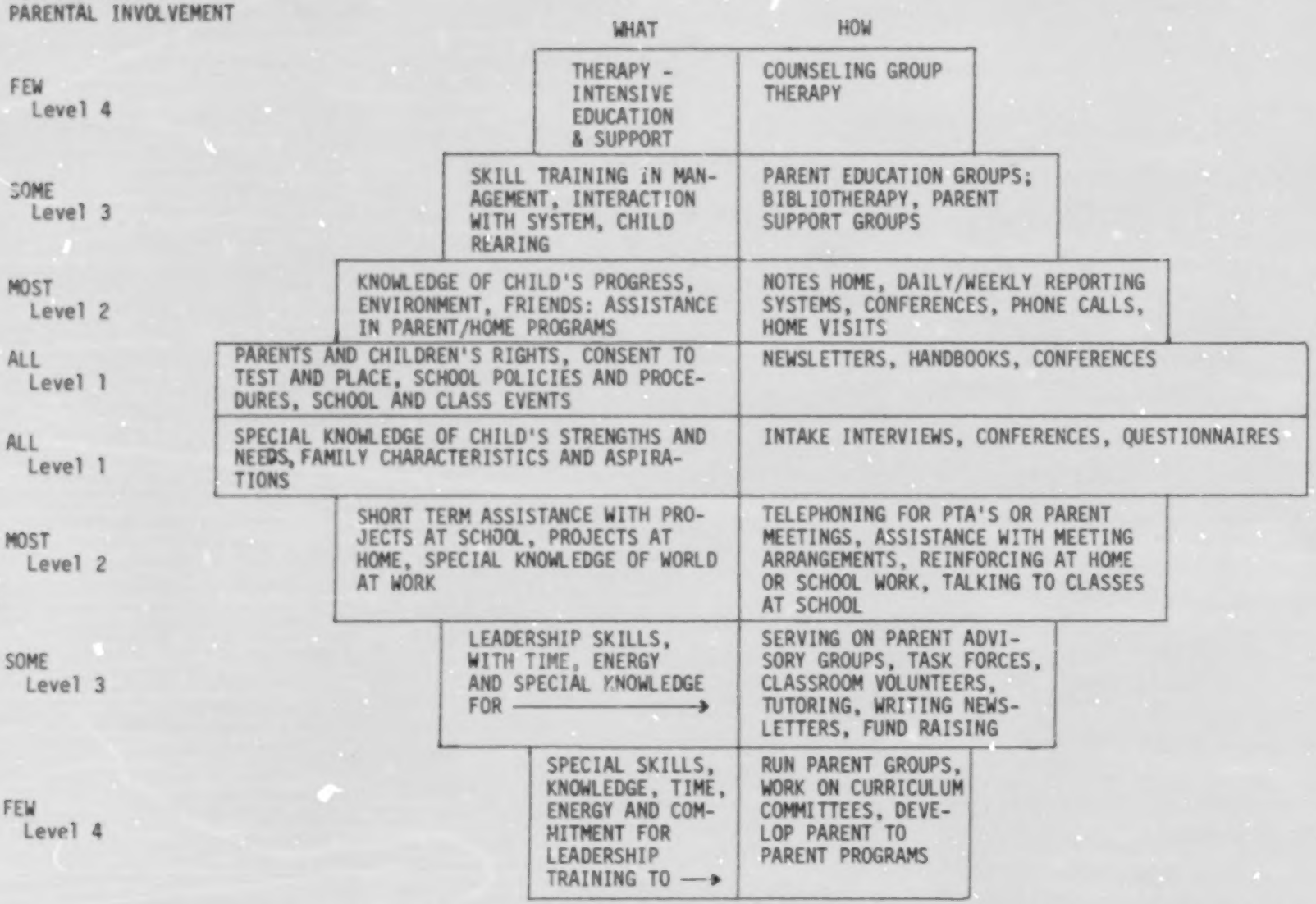
The Mirror Model or Parental Involvement (Kroth, 1980)

The Mirror Model is an attempt to respect the strengths that parents have, as well as to acknowledge the needs they may have. It is also an attempt to respect the extent to which parents can become involved with the schools. Parents of handicapped children of any handicapping condition are not a homogeneous group. Some are wealthy, some are poor; some are highly educated, some are illiterate; some have time, some do not; some have strong family structures, some have fragile relationships; some have extended families, some have none, and some have many children, while some have only one. All of these factors will affect the amount and type of parental involvement.

The top half of the Mirror Model addresses the levels of need that parents may have. It assumes that professionals have knowledge and skills which parents need. The top half also assumes that not all parents will need, or be able to use everything at the same time. The bottom half of the model addresses the levels of strength that parents may possess. It assumes parents have knowledge and skills that professionals or other parents need. It does not assume that all parents will be able or have time to provide everything as outlined.

Insert Fig. 1 Mirror Model about here

FIGURE I
MIRROR MODEL OF
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT


WHAT
HOW
FEW
Level 4
THERAPY - INTENSIVE EDUCATION & SUPPORT
COUNSELING GROUP THERAPY
SOME
Level 3
SKILL TRAINING IN MANAGEMENT, INTERACTION WITH SYSTEM, CHILD REARING
PARENT EDUCATION GROUPS; BIBLIOTHERAPY, PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS
MOST
Level 2
KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD'S PROGRESS, ENVIRONMENT, FRIENDS: ASSISTANCE IN PARENT/HOME PROGRAMS
NOTES HOME, DAILY/WEEKLY REPORTING SYSTEMS, CONFERENCES, PHONE CALLS, HOME VISITS
ALL
Level 1
PARENTS AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, CONSENT TO TEST AND PLACE, SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, SCHOOL AND CLASS EVENTS
NEWSLETTERS, HANDBOOKS, CONFERENCES
ALL
Level 1
SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD'S STRENGTHS AND NEEDS, FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND ASPIRATIONS
INTAKE INTERVIEWS, CONFERENCES, QUESTIONNAIRES
MOST
Level 2
SHORT TERM ASSISTANCE WITH PROJECTS AT SCHOOL, PROJECTS AT HOME, SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE OF WORLD AT WORK
TELEPHONING FOR PTA'S OR PARENT MEETINGS, ASSISTANCE WITH MEETING ARRANGEMENTS, REINFORCING AT HOME OR SCHOOL WORK, TALKING TO CLASSES AT SCHOOL
SOME
Level 3
LEADERSHIP SKILLS, WITH TIME, ENERGY AND SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR →
SERVING ON PARENT ADVISORY GROUPS, TASK FORCES, CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS, TUTORING, WRITING NEWSLETTERS, FUND RAISING
FEW
Level 4
SPECIAL SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, TIME, ENERGY AND COMMITMENT FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO →
RUN PARENT GROUPS, WORK ON CURRICULUM COMMITTEES, DEVELOP PARENT TO PARENT PROGRAMS

Beginning at the midline and working in levels up the model, each level will be discussed briefly regarding the needs of parents.

Level 1. All parents need some basic information about their childrens' school and the programs involved. Level 1 addresses the knowledge that parents should have to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Activities at this level often are handled too casually by teachers. "By the way, you'll need to sign this form before we can test your child", or "you may want to look over this handbook which explains our program". Follow-up surveys reveal that parents of handicapped children in particular have not been adequately informed about programs affecting their child (Dominguez, 1982). It would also seem that some school systems are apprehensive about informing parents about their role in consent to test, placement, educational programming and due process procedures. This is unfortunate because if school personnel do not do an adequate job, other organizations will, and this places professionals and parents in adversary roles.

Making sure that all parents have access to necessary information and that they understand it is a difficult task. Again, as regards special education the Federal Register and State Standards are not easy reading. As a result, many school districts have developed handbooks which answer parents' questions. Some school districts have developed workshops for parents on how to be active participants in the education programs (Kroth, 1979; Stevens, 1982). Special education teachers should be very knowledgeable of the laws and procedures concerning exceptional children so that they can answer questions with assurance and avoid the mystery and misconception that often accompanies this area.

All parents appreciate consistent information ragarding school and

class events. Teachers who keep parents informed on a regular basis will add a great deal to assure parental trust and acceptance of the school system.

Level 2. Most parents would like information about their child's progress and the school environment. There are many forms by which this can be transmitted. Some teachers prepare handbooks for their classrooms or they may use newletters. Teachers also hold regularly scheduled conferences with parents to report progress.

Daily or weekly report card systems and telephone contacts can be used for the whole class, or just in special cases. "Good news" notes are among the most successful methods of establishing rapport with parents. Skills in holding conferences with parents regarding their child's progress are valuable and included as a separate unit in this module. Extensive practice in listening skills, and conflict resolution skills will be especially helpful for teachers.

Level 3. This strand seems to be the most popular among the professionals and in the literature and yet only some of the parents will elect to become involved. It is estimated that only 20 to 40 percent of the potential parent population will attend skill training parent groups at any given time.

This is an area where professionals tend to become "tunnel visioned" according to Doernberg (1978). If the professional has a behavioral orientation, then all parents are encouraged to learn behavioral techniques, or if the professional has acquired training in Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1975), then all parents are offered training in this strategy.

There are probably an infinite number of parent group programs that could be designed to fulfill the expressed needs or anticipated needs of

parents. A school psychologist skilled in group process can design or help a teacher design any number of programs (Kroth & Scholl, 1978). In addition to the more traditional or "canned" programs, there are programs designed to teach parents to test their own children, make nutritional snacks, to make puppets to increase language, to teach toileting, to teach assertive techniques, to teach parents how to help make the transition to elementary school, midschool, or high school, to explore vocations, and in the case of exceptional children, to teach parents to write their own Individual Education Plans.

Quite often the teacher has established a good relationship with parents and therefore has an idea of the desired content for workshops. This module is not designed to incorporate any one type of parent education group in detail. The teacher interested in becoming involved at this level should study the various approaches and call upon school and community psychologists, counselors, nutritionists, therapists, etc., to assist in implementation.

Level 4. Even if the activities described in the first levels are carried out in a systematic way, a few parents will probably need in-depth training, or therapy. The school psychologist is in the best position to provide this service, or to serve as a referral person to the appropriate agencies.

It is highly probable that many of the anxieties and feelings of guilt can be alleviated by information, knowledge and skills which are provided in Levels 1, 2, and 3. It is also possible that a skilled teacher will be able to identify parents in these levels who are going to need a different program. They may be parents who are emotionally drained and whose coping skills are depleted. Individual counseling or the formation of support groups led by trained personnel could be

made available.

Starting at the midline and going down the model in Figure 1, are levels of strengths, or areas in which parents can contribute to a comprehensive parent involvement program. Parents have information, knowledge and skills that can be useful to professionals as well as to other parents.

Level 1. All parents know things about their children that professionals need to know. This may be such things as what is reinforcing to the child, or how the child learns best, or a variety of developmental milestones. In the case of exceptional children, much of this information is obtained formally through a case history which is usually taken when a child is being considered for a program.

School districts vary as to who is responsible for taking the case history. It may be the school psychologists, a school social worker, a special education coordinator, or teacher. If this activity is not coordinated, the parent may be placed in the position of repeating the same information many times. It is desirable for the people who need family information to get together and develop a form which would include all of their needs and yet not impinge on the rights of the parents or children involved.

Aside from special education, many regular school teachers are pleasantly surprised to learn simple techniques from parents that help make a child's day go smoothly. Regular teachers should learn to ask parents how they think the child will be most happy in a classroom.

Level 2. Most of the parents will be willing and able to give some additional help on a short term basis or which do not take them out of the home. They may be willing to reinforce at home what goes on in the classroom if the teacher is using a daily-weekly reporting system. They may be willing to supervise their child's homework assignments.

Most of them will be willing to serve on telephone calling committees or help with field trips if these events do not occur too often. Some parents will be willing to talk to a class about vocations and the world of work. Others will be willing to tutor in the classroom occasionally.

Coordinating these short term activities takes time. It involves matching parent strengths with educational and professional needs - usually on a short term basis.

Level 3. Some of the parents will have the time, strength, knowledge, and skill for a more concentrated commitment. Because parents are a heterogeneous group, some might be professionals with leadership training.

Advisory groups can be an important asset to special education programs (Kroth & Scholl, 1978). Unfortunately, parent participants often are not given any training in the roles that they assume. In most organizations, newly elected officers are offered some leadership training. This often does not happen in public school advisory groups. As a result, school administrators take on the leadership roles and parents may feel used rather than being contributors. Teachers are advised to suggest that someone be called in to train parents in leadership and management skills.

Task force groups are another way of using parents to assist in problem solving. Here, again, it is important that the mission of the task force is clearly defined. Most people do not mind contributing time and effort to problem solving activities if they feel that the products that emerge will be useful and used.

Parents in the business world can be quite helpful in curriculum recommendations for students in vocational programs. Most parents, if given a little training or orientation are very helpful as classroom

volunteers and newsletter contributors. Where appropriate, parents are a major asset for fund raising.

Level 4. A few parents will have the time, strength and ability to implement parent to parent programs and parent groups. They might serve as advocates for other parents. The training sequence for becoming a group leader is somewhat lengthy. First, the parent might go through a skills training program as a participant. If, for instance, it is a behavior management program, the parent would demonstrate the ability to take data and modify behavior. Second, the parent would act as an assistant to the professional group leader. At this stage, the parent would learn to use the equipment, offer assistance to parents and observe the leader. After the sessions, the leader and parent together critique the delivery of the workshops. In the third phase, the parent takes the leadership role and is assisted by the parent trainer. Every time the parent goes through the program, it increases the number of cases and examples the parent can draw from in future groups. The parent can then go on to help teachers who would like to implement parent groups in their schools.

As teachers coordinate groups they should be on the lookout for potential group leaders. There are many side benefits to having parents become involved in this capacity. Parents can often relate well to other parents. The "I've been there" attitude can create rapport quite quickly for some parents. Leading groups also increases skills in the technique. In other words, a person often learns better when trying to teach someone else. A third benefit is that the experience often increases the self concept of the parent.

Comprehensive parental involvement programs employing all levels of the model are a rarity. However, an analysis of a school's (or teacher's)

current program is useful. The following analysis sheet developed by Paula Parks at the Albuquerque Parent Involvement Center is based on the Mirror Model.

Insert Fig. 2 about here

The analysis profile is not meant to be inclusive, but it does pinpoint some activities that might be included in a comprehensive program. The assumption is that not all things need to be in place at the same time, but that analyzing one's current programs can lead to decisions about the next logical steps.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM
Analysis Sheet

Figure 2

	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	SELDOM	PRIORITY	PROJECTED START DATE	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
1. Provides written information on consent to test.						
2. Provides written information on consent to place.						
3. Provides written information on criteria to place.						
4. Provides written information on Due Process Procedures.						
5. Provides written information on availability of child's records.						
6. Has regularly scheduled conferences.						
7. Involves parents in planning the I.E.P.						
8. Has a newsletter.						
9. Has parent information group meetings.						
10. Uses daily-weekly report cards.						
11. Makes home visits.						
12. Has class handouts.						
13. Makes phone calls systematically.						
14. Uses "good news" notes.						
15. Interprets test results.						
16. Arranges skill training parent workshops (Behavior Mod., Parent Effectiveness Training, Prob. Solving)						
17. Takes family history.						
18. Elicits child strengths from parents.						
19. Conducts parental needs and strength assessment.						
20. Has "Room" parents.						
21. Has parents assist on fieldtrips, parties, etc.						
22. Has parent advisory groups.						
23. Has parent volunteers in the classroom.						
24. Involves parents in Special Interest Task Forces. (curriculum, discipline, needs & strengths assessment)						
25. Uses parents as co-partners for other parents.						
26. Uses parents as workshop leaders.						
27. Other.						

UNIT 2

PART B

FAMILY DYNAMICS

It should be noted that the research and literature on family (mostly) parental) reactions toward an exceptional child has been fairly narrow in scope. It deals mostly with severely handicapped children and with mental retardation. Not much is known about emotional involvement as regards less severely affected children or children whose handicap does not result in mental deficiency. In addition, there has been little attention paid to the positive, coping behaviors incorporated by the majority of parents. Although the defense mechanisms described in the following sections are viewed by many as positive ways to manage stress, we are concerned more with reorganization and problem solving types of behaviors. Awareness of what is known about family dynamics is nevertheless important.

This portion of the unit is divided into three sections. The first summarizes some of the literature regarding the emotional reactions parents may feel as a result of having an exceptional child. The second section reviews some of the theories which suggest that the child's characteristics are important influences on the overall emotions a family may have. Finally, the last section provides a group of exercises which might aid in shedding light on some of the situations that may arise as parents try and cope with the ongoing potential stress of having a handicapped child.

Parental Reaction

Factors influencing reactions of parents include whether the handicap is evident at birth or becomes evident later, after the parents have "fallen in love" with the child. Other factors include the severity

of the handicap, the extent to which it is obvious to others, and the attitudes of the people surrounding the family.

Freud; Solnit and Stark

In 1917, Freud wrote about narcissism and the study of object loss. In 1961, Solnit and Stark proposed their theory of mourning as a result of having given birth to a defective child. Based on Freud's contribution they theorized that mothers mourn the loss of the anticipated and desired healthy child.

Solnit and Stark go on to suggest that a continuum of pathological reactions can occur. At one extreme, the guilt feelings lead the mother to dedicate herself "unremittingly and exclusively" to the welfare of the child. At the other extreme the parent finds the child intolerable. These authors suggest that denial is used as a mechanism to dispel anxiety and depression.

Solnit and Stark offered some advice to social workers and physicians responsible for delivering the "verdict of reality". They suggest that the mourning period is a necessary reaction for parents, unless it becomes fixed. The process of translating and clarifying information about the child to the parent should come slowly. This requires that the professionals involved understand the various stages of mourning and be able to gauge the amount of reality a parent can handle at any one time.

Kubler-Ross; Duncan

The Solnit and Stark article was a catalyst which spurred the development of models for understanding immediate and later reactions of parents with a handicapped child. Various theories related to death and dying have been employed to encompass reactions resulting from loss of hoped-for attributes of a handicapped child. Duncan (1977) adapted

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' (1969) stages of grief theory in a presentation entitled "The Impact of a Handicapped Child Upon the Family". Seligman (1979) feels these stages are essential knowledge for teachers who may become confused about a parent's behavior. The following is a brief summary of the proposed developmental stages of mourning as suggested by Duncan and reported in Seligman's book. Additional work is cited when relevant.

Stage I - Denial

This is an unconscious defense mechanism that seems to help ward off excessive anxiety. Denial is suspected when the parents continue to shop around for a more favorable diagnosis. Duncan suggests that parents are aided in their denial by professionals who avoid absolutes. This is because professionals use ambiguous terms when describing the diagnosis or prognosis leaving the parent with the idea that the child will finally grow out of his problem.

In addition to shopping around, another example of the denial stage might be isolation whereby the parents simply try to withdraw from any part of society that reminds them their child is different. Some parents have avoided the knowing eyes of public school and find private schools that seem to fit the child's needs for a while.

As long as the denial is not chronic, it is considered a safe reaction to the stress of having a handicapped child. In addition, there is often good reason to seek new information as Hollingsworth and Pasnaw (1977) point out, especially when the complexity of the various handicapping condition is overwhelming.

Duncan contends that parents can be guided through the denial stage if they can see their child involved with normal children. She warns, however, that it is necessary for both parents to make the

transition from the denial stage, otherwise the conflicting perceptions will cause more stress.

Stage II - Bargaining

This stage is sort of an agreement to postpone the inevitable. Reality has begun to impinge on the parents' awareness and they search out cures. They believe they can help their child by getting involved in organizations for exceptional children, volunteering as aides, and contributing to worthy causes.

During this time parents pursue magic cures which are supported by recovery fantasies. Some parents, for example, may turn to high doses of very expensive vitamins and then make remarkable claims as to the child's improvements. Michaels and Schueman (1962) maintain that many parents believe that their child's major and sometimes only problem is speech. They continue therefore to search for magical cures related to speech such as mechanical devices, untested surgical procedures, and religious faith, often with such vigor that practical action is delayed.

Stage III - Anger

This explosive stage is characterized by anger, rage, envy and resentment. As the reality of the situation emerges this anger might be projected onto the spouse or professionals. It might be projected inward making the parent feel guilty or shameful. The anger might also be turned onto the child resulting in child battering or isolation and mental harassment.

Being aware that parents become angry as part of the mourning process will help keep the teacher's own anger in check.

Stage IV - Depression

It is theorized that guilt is one precursor to depression. Some

research suggests that this component of parental reactions is almost universal (AMA, 1965). When there is a great deal of confusion, the parent may be feeling guilty - guilty because of loving and hating the child at the same time.

Added to feelings of guilt may be feelings of shame and embarrassment. Financial burdens may now be a reality as it is realized the child needs special care, schooling, surgical operations, and equipment. Necessities begin to preclude small luxuries. Energy levels begin to drop and depression appears. Life now seems overwhelming to the parent. Duncan contends that recommendations are rarely carried out by the parents during this stage.

Some parents may talk about themselves as weak and helpless although their lives do not suggest this. It could be that this is the parent's way of expressing self doubt as a parent and whether or not care in the future for this helpless child will be adequate. Some of these parents may resist a relationship with a teacher because it would require dealing with more reality than the parent can handle.

Stage V - Acceptance

This final stage is characterized by realistic coping. Like depression, acceptance varies with the existence of other anxiety-producing factors. When parents reach this stage it is an indication they are ready to deal with the child's future and become unemotionally involved in planning.

This stage has probably come under more criticism than the others as far as its utility. Olshansky (1962) wondered whether the supposed desirability of this stage meant the parent had accepted the professionals point of view.

Child Affects on Adult Behavior

The above unidirectional theories have been challenged by several researchers (Kaslow & Cooper, 1978; Sears, 1951). One particularly insistent writer is Richard Bell (Bell, 1968, 1971; Bell & Harper, 1977). Bell's bi-directional theory considers the effects of th child s behavior on that of the parents as well as on subsequent patterns of parent-child interaction.

Bell-Bidirectional Theory

Anderson (1981) states that:

> Particularly relevant to a consideration of parent-handicapped child interaction is Bell's control theory. He proposes that upper-limit control behaviors of the parent are elicited by child behaviors which exceed parental standards or expectations - those that cross parents' tolerance level threshold in terms of intensity, frequency, or appropriateness.

In her 1981 article Anderson summarized literature that supports the bidirectional model. Some of her conclusions are presented here.

Parents respond to children who constantly display intense behaviors by increasing their efforts to control this unacceptable behavior. This reaction may elicit the child's control behaviors in turn, leading to an escalation of the aversive interaction and, perhaps, to the persistence of the negative pattern over time.

Substandard child behaviors (mental retardation) may eventually lead the parent either to coerce the child into greater responding and/or withdraw from the child in terms of communications. Highly aggressive or unresponsive children may elicit incidences of abuse because their behavior goes beyond the tolerance level of parents.

Anderson suggests that awareness of the patterns that maintain maladaptive interaction is very valuable information. If children

elicit negative reactions in parents it is likely that the same is true for other adults. In many cases, the teacher will be able to bring about some change in these behaviors in school through awareness techniques, sociodrama, bibliotherapy and behavior management. Through group parent education meetings teachers can help parents become aware of their negative feelings and levels of tolerance.

Temperament facotrs such as irritability, the ease of soothing a child, alterness, activity level, and responsiveness have been shown to influence parental reactions to a child (Thomas & Chess, 1977). A very young infant's repertoire of behaviors and characteristics contribute to the child's own developmental process. In cases of special children these factors are even more influential but the contribution is often ignored (Beckman-Bell, 1981). When professionals fail to overlook child contributions, they may critize parent's who are unsuccessful with home management or intervention programs. At times parents are even held responsible for the child's condition itself.

Frodi (1981) suggests that some characteristics of an atypical child affect the likelihood of abuse. This is because they are perceived as aversive and may trigger aggressive response in certain caregivers. An example is a nonverbal child's use of biting as a method of obtaining needed attention. Although it may not be possible to directly alter a child's temperament, Thomas and Chess (1977) suggest it may be possible to train parents to respond in different ways toward their child's behavioral style.

Balkwell and Halverson (1980) through their laboratory work have delineated several sources of stress for families that include a hyperactive child:

1. If one person is the sole caregiver, there is little time

or energy left for the spouse or other family members. Parents may have to separately engage in family activities which would normally be shared.

2. When a hyperactive child is involved, babysitters may be hard to find and need special training. The relatives may be reluctant to keep the child because of difficulty in controlling behavior.

3. There is always the constant reality that society will not be accepting of the controlling procedures necessary to keep the hyperactive child contained. Negative judgments may result when parents use drugs or diet to control their child's behavior.

4. Siblings may be stressed when parents devote more time to the special child. They may resent the relaxing of rules on behalf of the difficult child. Participation in special events may have to be restricted.

5. Certainly the effect of all this change and reorganization has its impact on the handicapped child. Halverson and Waldrop (1970) found that parents become "set for trouble" even when no misbehavior occurs. Negative self-feelings confound the situation when the hyperactive child is remotely aware of his stress on the family system.

Blackwell and Halverson maintain that these stressors are relevant for other handicapping conditions. They conclude by cautioning all professionals that little research has focused on just how a family might be affected when professionals insist on certain management strategies. Teachers should know the parents well before becoming too enthusiastic about suggesting home programs.

Stress and Coping

Thus far this unit has provided some of the theories that give insight into the dynamics of family interaction. The emphasis has been on the seemingly negative defense mechanism or reactions parents and families may have as a result of having an exceptional child. However, the majority of parents and families succeed in coping with the stress in healthy, constructive fashions. Coping skills, of course, vary with families and within families. To date very little experimental documentation has come forth regarding coping skills because of the vast

number of variable involved. More information about exact problems facing families and about problem-solving behaviors needs to be known. The information currently available is interesting even though some of it is out of the realm of the educator and must be left to clinicians.

There are three factors included in coping mechanisms which should be considered. The first includes changing actual perceptions of problems. This concept was evident in the discussion of parental reactions of the child. For example, as parents begin to realize the actuality of the child's handicaps and seek appropriate help, their earlier perceptions give way to a redefinition that allows reduction of stress.

The second method of coping is manifest in changing the parents' or siblings' own behavior toward the child. Hence such parent education programs as Parent Effectiveness Training or STEP have been widely used to aid parents in their approach to children.

Finally, discipline seems to be the key to reduction of stress in many instances. Often the type of discipline used is analyzed to determine its successful reduction of stress, and parents have been trained to become change agents for their children (O'Dell, 1974; Patterson, 1971) as a method of coping.

There are several independent coping resources that successful families seem to have available and some are listed here:

1. There is a great deal of evidence to show that the supportive, strong father will add greatly to the coping resources of the family (Lynn, 1974). The teacher is encouraged to consistently recommend that the father participate and become aware of the role he plays in the emotional tone of the family.
2. It follows from #1 above that fathers who participate in any or all aspects of treatment for the child will add greatly

to the quality of coping within the family. Often the unemployed mother will see the added strain of involving the employed father as unfair because work responsibilities are often seen as draining of all energy. These attitudes are slowly changing, however, with more mothers employed and more fathers being forced to accept half the responsibility for their child. An early study by Plotsky and Shereshefsky (1960) suggests fathers can find the experience of being involved in treatment both meaningful and constructive. When planning, teachers should include separate "at home tasks" for fathers, mothers, and siblings in addition to the family tasks (strictly limiting the time involved, of course).

3. Parents and families who are coping well do not become social isolates. They visit and encourage visitation; they participate in voluntary associations or activities; they involve themselves often in society and interact with people. Teachers may find their greatest contribution will be to sponsor a large pot-luck picnic. By involving as many parents and families as possible this social gathering may be more valuable than group meetings or parent workshops.

   Social isolation for some parents, according to Price-Bonham and Addison (1978) is an adaptive process which does lead to more healthy coping strategies. The teacher should turn to the child for clues as to whether the isolation is beneficial. For example, there is a high probability that the secure, happy child is not suffering from parental withdrawal from the community. A close look should also be given to siblings and their state of mental health relative to the isolation.

4. Healthy, coping parents are willing to seek and utilize assistance from others, especially the extended family. One major obstacle to this coping strategy for some families is the inability of the extended family to understand and empathize appropriately. Time would be well spent to seek out and/or develop materials that promote the value of extended families and of friends as support systems for parents with exceptional children. Teachers could occasionally find ways to involve close relatives, friends, and even caregivers.
5. Parents who agree on child rearing practices will offer valuable consistency to children as well as reduce stress for each other when there are questions. The roots of this skill go back to assessment of values and communication. Teachers can suggest the importance of this constantly through newsletters and gradually induce parents to attend group meetings that include values clarification techniques.
6. Parents who are "low" on scales of frustration, authoritarianism, and rigidity tend to cope better. Although the teacher is hardly expected to make major changes in personality characteristics, a little informal aid would be helpful. The constantly frustrated parent probably feels useless and inadequate with the child and needs assurance for the positive things that are accomplished. The authoritarian parent who uses strong discipline at home might benefit from a videotape showing success with children without the need for force and physical restraint. The rigid parent would need reinforcement for any change of patterns or techniques.
7. Parents who are able to cope well appear to be more organized

in their daily living. Their time is such that they aren't speeding to make appointments, they find time for personal enjoyment, and they seem at ease with unexpected events. Aside from personality characteristics, a lot of the success with time management depends on the number of ages of other children as well as the amount of extra-curricular activities they are involved in. Many families are amazed to find how helpful a workshop on time management can be.

8. "The world breaks everyone and afterwards many are strong in the broken places." (Hemingway). Many parents who are strong, are so, because they've mastered situations through successful problem-solving skills. These parents are able to isolate the problem, attach priorities, list positives and negatives and come up with solutions within their resource limits. More importantly, these parents see the situation as needing change rather than the child needing-to-be-changed. Verbatim examples in a newsletter of ways other parents have dealt with obstructions will call attention to the need to develop problem-solving skills.

9. Families who cope well have deep respect for the exceptional child. They are able to look beyond the handicap into the child as a person, to walk in his shoes, or to see the world as he does. This is not easy because it means seeing frustration and pain and inner struggles. The parent who can emphathize in this manner will make life easier for the child through the understanding. Books written for this purpose are highly recommended and if possible a teacher might have his own supply and lending library - charging a nominal fee in order to maintain the library.

10. Parents who cope well allow the child to develop a strong sense of self responsibility. Heisler (1972) contends that ". . . there is no psychological need more important to the child's later maturity and stability than the development of his potential capacity for self-direction." (p. 103). Parents need guidance in this area, especially for specific exceptionalities. Where does one draw the line with discipline, for example? Parents can be taught the principle, for development in order to fit their values regarding child rearing into an acceptable method of discipline fc the individual child. The characteristics inherit in the family or parental process with nonhandicapped children that positively influence child development are worthy of consideration for the parents of exceptional children. For example:

    1. Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton (1972) found that prompt attention to needs and giving "floor freedom" to explore the environment were essential variables for positive growth with infants.

    2. Klaus and Kennell (1976) found that mothers who spoke positively with fewer commands had children who progressed normally and with less problems.

    3. Milner (1951) found that children did better on language scores if they had been read to often, had more mealtime conversations, and received less harsh physical punishment.

    4. Carew, Chan, and Halfar (1976) found that children were more competent by 3 years of age if their mothers were good organizers, arrangers, and in control of their children's experiences and routines. These children were allowed to help with home chores, and were allowed access to items considered messy and even dangerous. The competent children were read to daily and TV was restricted.

    5. Swan and Stavros (1973) found that more successful and self-confident children had parents who's child-rearing philosophy allowed for independence, understanding and respect of the child.

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Introduction to Discussion Groups

Considering the possible dynamics that can occur in a family with a handicapped child it can be seen that the family is vulnerable. It is forced not only to react within its own system but to cope in its relationship to the community. The family is also called upon to constantly reorganize itself in order to meet each crisis that centers around different stages in the childs life. Other stressors, which normally occur with all families, may be enhanced due to the fact that energies are already taxed to the limit.

In order to regenerate intself the family needs to procure community and social support at various levels in the child's development. Teachers are a strong source of such support, particularly in their capacity to aid with everyday child management strategies. The teacher who is ready to give support realizes the vulnerability of the family but does not view the family itself as handicapped or as "a patient". This teacher understands that the majority of families are managing stress in the most effective ways they have available. When the more traditional methods of coping lose their effectiveness, however, the teacher's role will be to provide support and with time, alternatives.

The following situations are to be used for small group discussion. A few possible responses and cautions are provided which should be expanded. Students should be assured that there are few wrong responses. They should be encouraged to respond freely and then analyze their responses. This should be considered a learning experience.

* * * * * * *

Divide the class into groups, each with the same situations but with different responses. Give at least one group no responses so that their task is to come up with a completely different conversation.

Situation #1 - Confusion

Each professional seen by a parent has an opinion about the handicapping conditions resulting in no clear cut diagnoses and vague prognoses. This is especially confounded when the child is diagnosed early.

A parent says to a teacher: "This doctor tells me this; that diagnostician says something else. I don't know where to turn." (Not for consideration: It is possible that professionals say the same thing but use different technical language.)

Response (A): Offer to take time with the parent to go over each professional comment together.

Caution: The teacher should be neutral and careful not to add to the confusion by criticizing any professional or disregarding any advice, no matter how puzzling.

Response (B): Discuss with parents how they see the situation. Get their opinion.

Caution: Take care not to ridicule or disregard these opinions. Remember that you do not spend 24 hours a day with the child or that you have not progressed with him through his life.

Situation #2 - Expectations

The parents have ideas far beyond what teachers know they or the child can accomplish. But one parent says: "My neighbor's kid is a whole lot dumber than my kid. She can't even play baseball as good as Janey. But she can read and I think Janey can too".

(Note for consideration: (a) literature and experience tell us that parents see their child accomplishing things that experts suggest were not possible. This reinforces the parents' ideas that the child can reach high levels in all areas; (b) father or mother may have experienced failure themselves and are concerned about their child going through similar painful events.)

Response (A): Let the parents know their attention to the child's strengths (in this case, baseball) is very valuable. Ask for other strengths.

Response (B): Let parents know teacher realize parents value reading. Briefly task analyze the reading sequence for them in order that they understand the steps involved. Feel free to give away "trade secrets". Write them down for the parent.

Caution: Expectations can go in either direction. The parents and siblings can expect too little of the child also and thus use his lower functioning as an excuse not to provide necessary stimulation.

Situation #3 - Denial of Diagnosis and/or Prognosis

A parent comments regarding his child: "My child is Down's Syndrome. That may be true, but I don't think he's retarded".

Response (A): Explain to the parents that you know from their concern that they would like to be kept constantly informed of their child's progress which can be done through a daily reporting system such as suggested in Unit 6.

Response (B): Ask parents to help by keeping good charts and records so that you can compare at-home progress with school progress. Explain that many more practical behaviors happen at home and it's helpful for the teacher to know of these.

Caution: Trying to convince parents the opposite of what they feel and want to believe is fruitless. Use your efforts to bring reality into perspective in a subtle manner. Always keep the child's positive self-concept in mind and teach the parents to dwell on the child's strengths.

Situation #4 - Parental Expectations on Professionals

I've heard you can work wonders with children. Our friend's child learned to talk much sooner than the doctor had predicted. We hope you'll do the same for Timothy."

Response (A): "Each child is an individual and we are still learning about differences among children. You can rest assured that I will continue to study and use all techniques I feel appropriate."

Response (B): Assure the parents that you will look for any similar strengths Timothy shares with past students but that you are particularly interested in Timothy's unique strengths and can they help?

Caution: Some parents of handicapped children tend to give professionals a lot of credit for their expertise (see for example, Barsch, 1969). There is nothing wrong with saying "I don't know".

Caution: Being too positive with parents can be a serious pitfall. The professional must strike a balance between being positive and being realistic. Predicting future abilities of children is never positive or realistic.

Situation #5 - Balance

"I had to pull our oldest son out of the orchestra. Just not enough time to get him back and forth."

Comment: Parents need balance - all attention cannot be focused

on the exceptional child. At the same time there are those who caution that parents greatly resent and feel threatened when it is even remotely suggested that they are neglecting their "normal" child. Situations such as this are especially hard for teachers. Appropriate response depends a great deal on how well the teacher knows the family.

Response (A): Supposing the parent is only needing to say once again how strapped she is for time because of this exceptional child, one response might be to say the it is realized that all her time is spent chauferring children.

Response (B): "Wonder" (aloud) about possible rides from other parents or public transportation. Be prepared for excuses, but don't comment further.

Response (C): Reflect that this parent should make a list of everything she does for a week. Perhaps between the two of you, you could find some time for her to have free for just herself.

Situation #6 - Discipline

A parent arrives irate one morning to let the teacher know in no uncertain terms that her child is disrespectful and won't mind at home. The parent says it's the teacher's fault.

Research: In a large study designed to measure parent attitudes, the Foundation for Child Development found that only one-third of parents held themselves responsible for discipline and limit setting (Wagner, 1979).

Response (A): The teacher might consider some of the techniques suggested in the Tips for Dealing with Aggressive section of this competency cluster.

Response (B): The teacher might agree with the parent that discipline is indeed a problem. One thing that's happening to today's

children is that they have many people telling them what to do and consistency is lost. Suggest that the teacher and the parent work on one discipline problem at a time, and ask the parent to choose. Then take special care and time to determine her real expectations of this child and what she really means by discipline or disrespect.

* * * * * * * *

UNIT 2

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UNIT 2

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UNIT 3

VALUES

Introduction

The manner we use to intervene with parents and families is probably similar to the style we use with our own families (Davis, 1981). Freeman (1976) suggests that it is difficult to see other families as healthy if those families differ significantly from our own (although at times the opposite prevails).

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Exercise 1 - Our Own Family

We begin this unit by borrowing freely from Jane Davis' (1981) exercises in The Ecology of Care, as an introduction to understanding how we view our own family situation.

1. List three things your parents did to you that you will never do to your children.
2. What would you do differently?
3. Who in your family of origin did you differ from most?
4. How were differences shown?
5. How were they negotiated?
6. If you did not negotiate the differences, what happened?
7. How do you negotiate differences now?
8. Describe the style of personality you have the most difficulty in dealing with.
9. Describe a crisis that occured in your present family.
10. Who/what was most helpful? How?
11. Who/what was least helpful?
12. Name positive stresses you have experienced. Name negative stresses? What was the difference?

13. What disease would you most dread to have yourself? Why?

14. What disease would you most dread a family member to have? Why?

15. How would you react if this happened to you?

16. In your family of origin, what were the worst kinds of things that ever happened to you? What kinds of situations were they? what happened?

17. Are you still sensitive to those same types of situations today?

18. What do you experience inside when you feel vulnerable or unsafe? (Internal signals)

19. What do you do when you are upset, scared, feeling vulnerable? (External signals)

20. What is missing for you; what can you do for yourself when you feel vulnerable?

21. Describe what you would like to happen when you are feeling vulnerable.

22. What signals in others can you identify as gestures of vulnerability?

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Values*

During the 1960's and 70's there was rather a widespread interest in the values clarification movement. A number of articles and books were written with values clarification exercises provided for the readers. Many of these books were authored by or coauthored by Sid Simon, Merrill Harmon, Louis Raths, and Howard Kirschenbaum. The books include exercises to help adults become aware of some of the values that they hold and to clarify their beliefs in these values. This movement has not been without its critics. Authors, such as Stewart (1975), have questioned the use of certain types of values clarification exercises. For instance, it has been pointed out that in voting exercises in which participants raise their hands or lower

*A large amount of this material is taken directly from Strategies for Effective Parent-Teacher Interaction.

their hands with regard to agreement on certain values, they may be unduly pressured by their peers. In this case, a teacher might hesitate to raise his hand and say that he does not enjoy working with parents. Regardless of one's philosophical position or propensity toward training, it seems important for one to be aware of personal values.

It is obvious that people do not always act on data. For example on a pack of cigarettes it says, "The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health"; however, there are still millions of cigarette smokers in this country. The data would indicate that being overweight may cause early death or other kinds of health problems and yet many people who read these data are overweight. Data are available which would indicate that the use of daily or weekly reporting systems can accelerate the growth of children and, at the same time, many of our teachers do not use these systems.

It is also interesting to note that we place value judgments on observed behavior. In the United States, people eat by sticking their fork into their food with their left hand, cutting it, transferring the fork to their right hand and putting it into their mouth. In Europe it is more common for a person to hold his fork in his left hand, cut his food, and put the food in this mouth with his left hand. In other parts of the world, people use their fingers or sticks to put the food in their mouth. Even though the body is being nourished, we have a tendency to say that people do not eat correctly from other parts of the world. While it is true that many value judgments that we place on people probably do not have ill effects, it is also true that some may. Therefore, it seems important to us that we become aware of our own values and the values of others to see whether there is potential for conflict. Attempts to argue down or prove that another's set of values untenable will be met with

resistance, either passive or aggressive.

Value

A set of values or a value is an internalized set of principles derived from past experience which has been analyzed in terms of its morality. Massey (1979) suggests that most of our values are fairly well set by the age of ten. He says that in the early stages of life, imprinting takes place, then modeling, and then the socialization stage. During these early stages our values are set by the people around us, particularly by our parents. Then our religion or our church affiliations, our peers, our school, our teachers, the educational process that we are in, our heroes, all begin to have a significant effect on our value system. Massey suggests that a fairly good idea of another person's values can be gained by taking a look at the world around that person when he was ten years old.

If it is true that our values are well set at an early age, then it behooves us to become aware of what these value systems include in ourselves. It also indicates that we should be aware that others will have different value systems and that we may be in direct conflict with people with whom we interact. It may well be that one of the destructive forces in parent-teacher interaction is the fact that different sets of values are operating during conferences and other communications.

Values and Teachers

Teachers are constantly involved in interaction with other people. Many of the things that teachers do in the classroom are modeled by the children. Teachers who yell may have children who yell in class. Teachers who are strick and have high expectations for behavior often have children who also have high expectations for achievement.

Teachers often place value judgments on the behavior they observe

in children and their parents. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear teachers say that the child has not been raised correctly because he does not behave appropriately and that it is the influence of the home. Or if a parent does not show up for a meeting, the judgment may be passed that the parents do not care. If the parent calls the teacher at home at night, the judgment may be that the parent is an overanxious parent.

This same set of behaviors may be valued or interpreted in a different way. For instance, if the parent does not show up for a conference, it may be interpreted that the parent values being home with the child more than coming to school. Or if the parent calls the teacher at home at night, it may be interpreted that the parent is a very concerned and interested parent in his child's progress.

As teachers then, it becomes necessary to analyze our own values to see what kind of interpretation we are placing on others' behavior. It is entirely possible, for instance, that teachers and parents may conflict over rather significant things that can be worked out through discussion. For instance, at the secondary level, it may be that the teacher values socialization. The teacher may feel that if the student learns to get along well with his or her peers and other staff members that the student will have an opportunity to be successful in the business world. On the other hand, it may be that the parents feel that the child still needs to work a great deal on academics. They become concerned because the teacher is not spending as much time on reading, writing, and arithmetic as they feel is necessary. This is a conflict over values. Each person may care a great deal about the child but that there are different ways to reach a common goal: a successful adult.

Throughout this unit, we will offer several values exercises. Most of these pertain to working with parents and giving participants an

opportunity to see how they feel about these activities and how they would act under certain circumstances.

It should be rather clear by this time that you will recognize that we, the authors of this program, feel rather strongly that parent-teacher interaction, participation, and cooperation are extremely important to the child's growth and development. We also believe that most teachers and parents value child growth. In addition, we feel that often the lack of interaction is not due to how much value is attached to this cooperative effort but rather that people do not have the knowledge or skills or feel comfortable about the interaction between parents and teachers. In this respect then, we try not to say you must interact with parents extensively but, if you value it, here are some ways that you can proceed. It is our hope that, throughout the course, teachers will go through a process which involves choosing to have more positive interactions with parents and that they will prize this behavior and will act on this value.

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Exercise 2 - Q Sort

Target Behavior, a behavioral Q Sort (Kroth, 1973) was developed by the first writer as a diagnostic tool. Based on the Q Sort technique developed by William Stephenson it allows children to select their own targets for modification of undesirable behavior. A modification of Kroth's forced choice Q Sort is offered here as another tool in clarification of one's own values as they might differ from, or approximate, a teachers' perception of the ideal parent.

The individual teacher should be interested in the items at the extreme ends of the form board. Forced choice tasks of any type are frustrating but they may offer valuable insight if the person is honest with responses.

Preparation

Reproduce Figure 3 and Figure 4 for each student. Cut apart the sections of Figure 3 and place each set in an envelope.

Instructions

"Sort these statements from the envelope onto the formboard according to your perception of yourself."

Place Fig. 3 about here

Place Fig. 4 about here

When complete, discuss columns 1 and 2. It might be interesting to record the group frequency of each response to point out the vast differences in what people consider most important when forced into a choice.

A second area of discussion would be how parents might differ and how each teacher might respond. For example, if a teacher is most likely to show emotion openly how will he respond to the passive parent?

At the other end, if it is most unlike a teacher to be defensive, how will she react to the very defensive mother? If it is most unlike the teacher to celebrate birthdays, how will she respond to the parent who insists on a great ordeal for her child's birthday, at school?

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Exercise 3 - Values Clarification Exercises

The instructor should review the following publications and select appropriate values clarification exercises for the class.

Fig. 3 Q- SORT ADAPTATION

(These sections should be cut apart in order that the person doing the sorting can place them appropriately on the next page (Fig. 4) which is the formboard.)

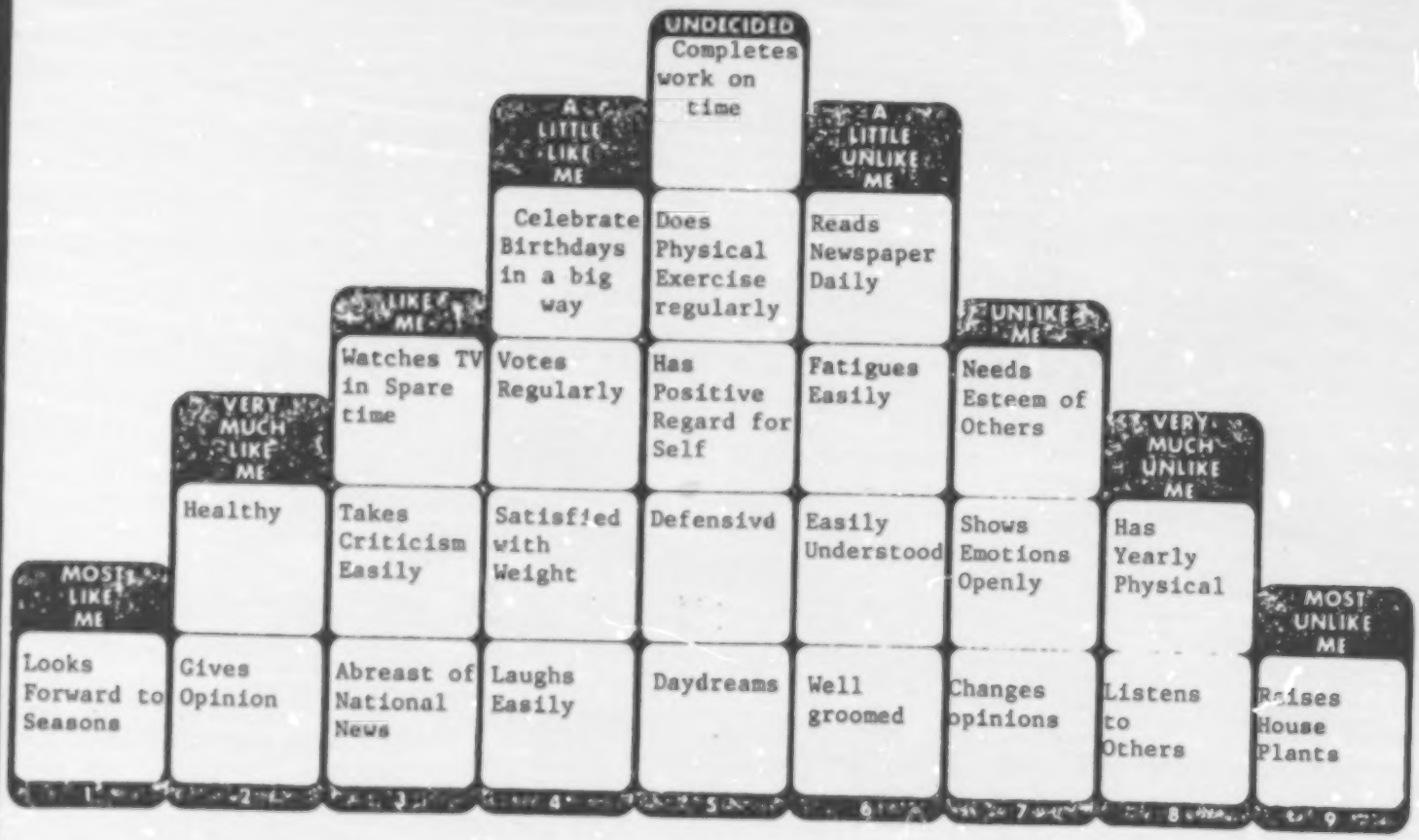
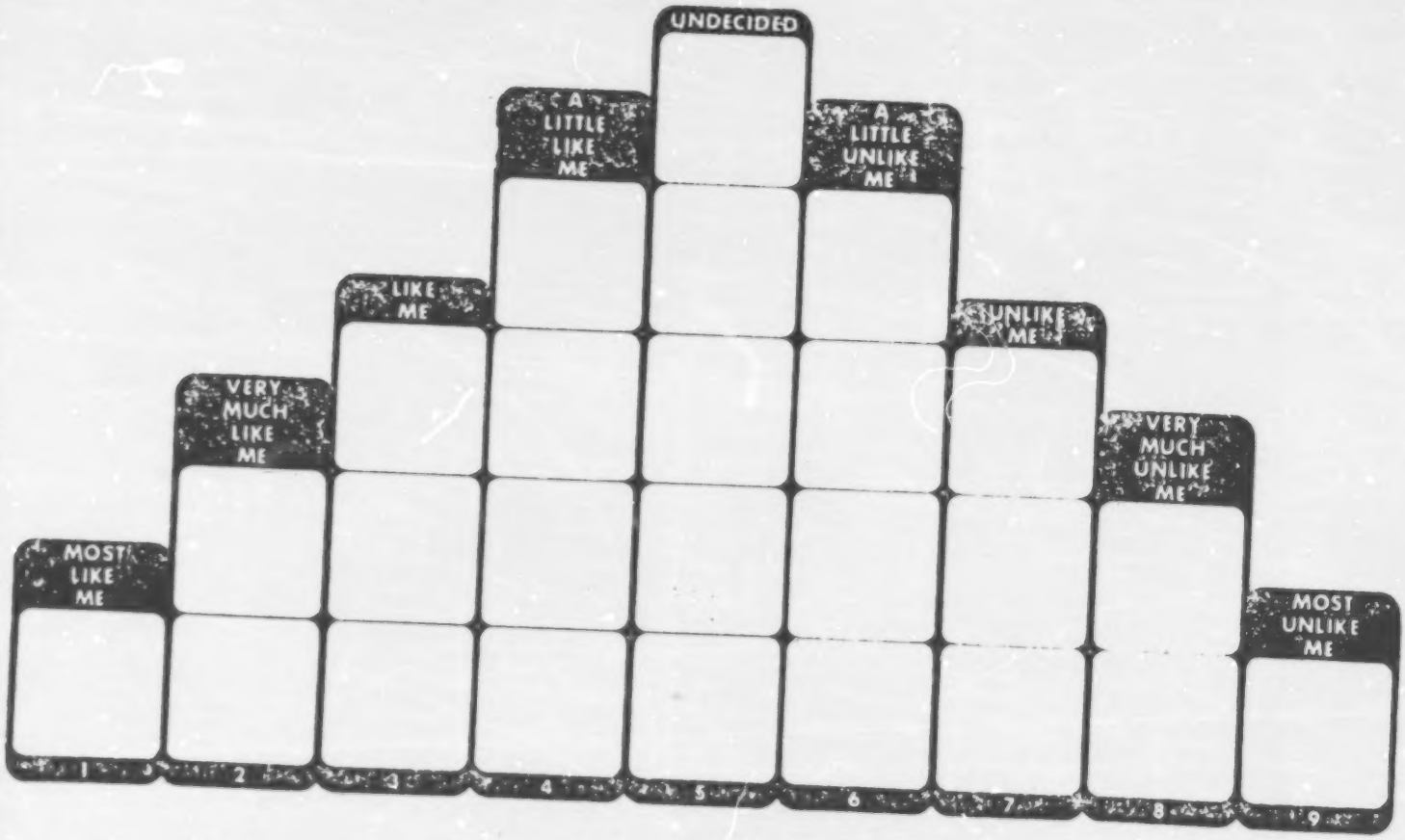


Fig. 4 Q - SORT ADAPTATION FORMBOARD

INSTRUCTIONS: Consider the statements written on the small sections provided with this formboard. Ask yourself: "I am a person who ...." and then sort the sections onto the formboard.



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Simon, S.B., Howe, L.W., & Kirschenbaum, H. Values clarification: A handbook of practical strategies for teachers and students. New York: Hart, 1972.

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In addition the instructor should secure the following articles regarding cultural awareness, single parenting and reconstituted families for dissemination and discussion.

Cultural Awareness:

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Exercise 4 - The Handicapped Ranking Scale

Professionals who will be working with exceptional people need to be aware of the attitudes they have toward severity of handicapping conditions. Teachers should complete the following Scale and discuss the results.

Fig. 5 Handicap Ranking Scale

_____ Elementary

_____ Secondary

Type of Handicap Taught _____

Sex: M_____ F_____

Categories of handicapping conditions are listed below. Please rank these, from one to ten, according to your own feelings, on the basis of severity. Which handicap do you feel is the most severe problem a child could have? Which handicap do you feel is second most serious? Which do you feel is the third most serious, and so forth. Consider only the individual and his problem in adjustment to school and life.

	Handicap	Rank
1.	Blindness	____
2.	Brain Injury	____
3.	Crippled and other health impaired	____
4.	Deafness	____
5.	Gifted	____
6.	Emotional Disturbance	____
7.	Epilepsy	____
8.	Learning Disabilities	____
9.	Mental Retardation	____
10.	Speech Impaired	____

*Kroth, Roger L., and Simpson, Richard L. Parent conferences as a teaching strategy. Denver, Colorado: Love Publishing Co., 1977.

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Suggested Readings

Roleplaying

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Elms, A.C. Influence of fantasy ability on attitude change through role-playing. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 36-43.

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Introduction to Units 4, 5, 6, and 7

Up to this point a great deal of time and certainly energy has been spent on preparing the taecher to meet parents. The intent has not been to make teachers into instant counselors. Rather the focus has been on making teachers aware of the needs and values of parents. It is hoped that this awareness, in combination with attention to their own philosophies, will help in making teachers feel psychologically comfortable working with adults.

It is recognized that spontaneity is an important personal quality that will promote a trusting relationship if paired with honesty. Spontaneity comes easily once the teacher has made an effort to explore possible complications when dealing with parents. Reading about solutions will only result in minimal comfort. Role playing and acting out situations may relieve discomfort. We, therefore, encourage trainers to set up the simulated situations recommended in the following units.

The units are offered as practical aids and guides for different levels of parent-teacher interaction. Many teachers will never have the desire or time to go beyond the conference level of involvement. For those who will venture into other levels we hope these brief introductions into techniques will be valuable.

One final word before beginning the practical units. Parents in general and as a whole are generous, caring people who have faith in teachers. Even those who seem the most disorganized or distraught can be easy to work with and appreciate the efforts made by teachers. The final units are provided to make the system of parent-teacher interaction run more smoothly.

UNIT 4

LISTENING SKILLS

Listening

One of the necessities of life seem to be the need to be listened to. We hear it in our songs, we read it in our literature. When people feel good or when they feel bad they seem to have a need to tell it to someone. There is an interesting book entitled Your Most Enchanted Listener by Wendell Johnson, 1956. The underlying theme of this book is that you, yourself, are your most enchanted listener. The author makes the point over and over again that the art of talking to ourselves is an auditory act as much as it is a vocal one: In order to test out ideas that we have we say them outloud so we can hear ourselves.

We often see people talking to themselves. Children walking across the playground alone seem to be mumbling or talking aloud. We sometimes see people in the car next to us who look like they're alone and who are talking to themselves. Many of us, if we would acknowledge it, have the experience of talking to ourselves about the work or activities that we are engaged in. Most of us have the experience of roleplaying situations before we enter them, particularly if they might be anxiety producing. For instance, if you're preparing for a job interview, you probably rehearse ahead of time saying such things as, "If he says this, I'll say this and if he says this, I'll say that". We practice the kinds of interactions we're going to have. This is usually healthy.

One of the problems that teachers often have is that they are quite verbal people; they abhor silence. As a result, if there is quiet during the conference the teacher is apt to step in and talk. The Flanders Rule of two-thirds says, that in a normal classroom, two-thirds of the time there's talk going on, two-thirds of that time is teacher talk, and two-thirds of that teacher talk time is directive teacher talk, i.e., pick up

your pencil, turn to the page, do the problems on your work sheet. In this respect, it is interesting to have teachers tape record some of their conferences and record the amount of time devoted to parent talk. If it's true as Johnson would say, that we are our most enchanted listeners and that we learn from what we say, then teachers would be learning more in the conference than parents. This does not mean that it is not appropriate for teachers to talk during the conference. In fact, in many instances where teachers are sharing information with parents, they probably will do a disproportionate amount of the talking. However, if one wants to encourage the parent to learn, then it behooves the teacher or other professionals to allow the parents plenty of talk time.

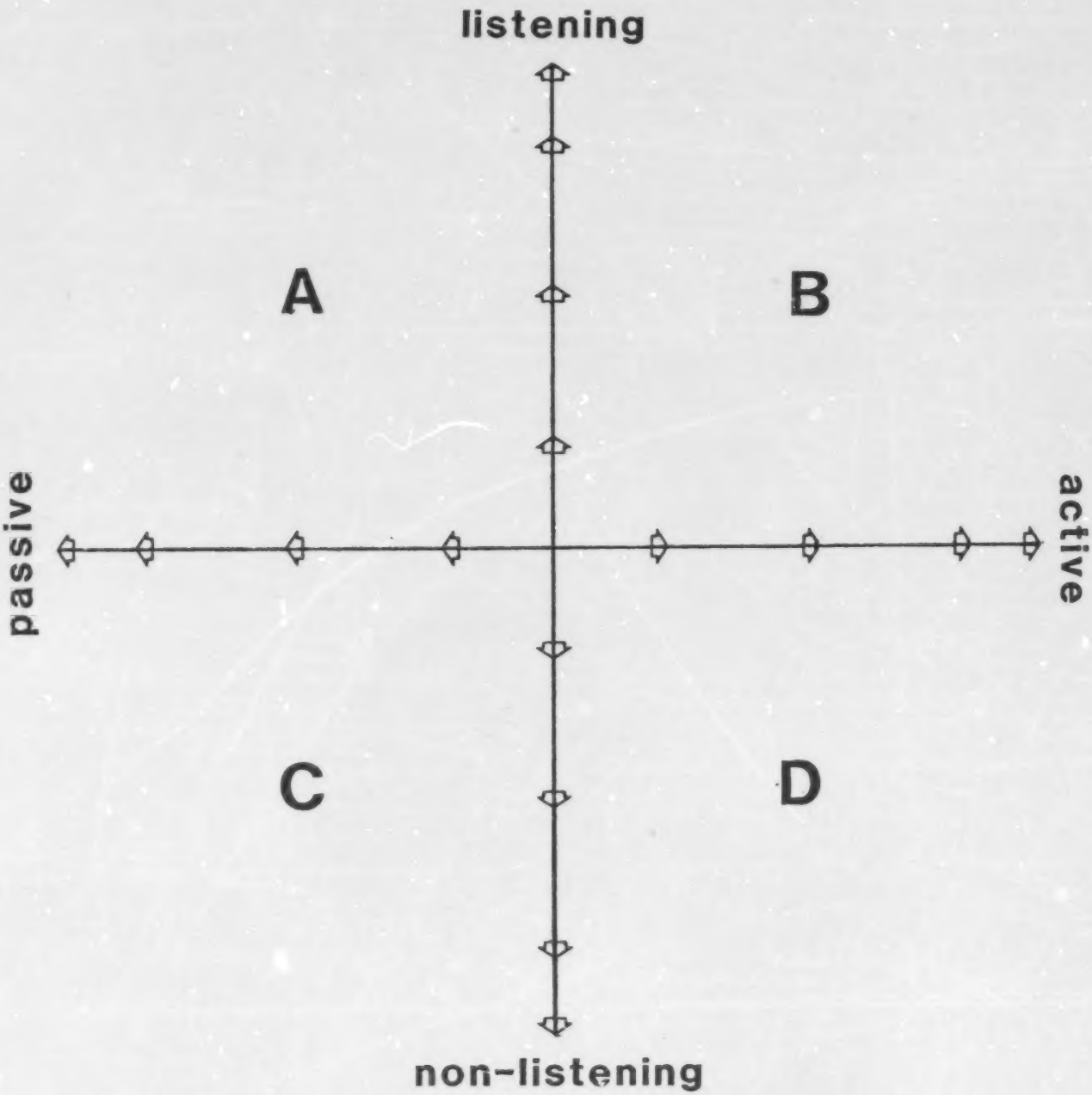
A Listening Paradigm

A Listening Paradigm (Kroth, 1975) is a model developed to analyze listening styles and hopefully it is a model by which people can look at their own listening styles. The vertical line going from Listening at the top to Non-listening at the bottom would suggest that most of us fit someplace along that continuum. We are listeners (or do a lot of listening) all the way down to being non-listeners. The horizontal line goes from passive on the left to active on the right. This would suggest that most of us fit someplace on that continuum, from being very passive in the way that we react to someone talking, to being quite active. This is not to suggest that we don't change from time to time or from situation to situation but it does allow us to reflect on our most common traits or characteristics. The letters A, B, C, and D are placed in the quadrants.

Insert Fig. 6 Listening Paradigm about here

Fig. 6

A Listening Paradigm



For instance, the B is in the quadrant which includes both listening and active. This would suggest that a B type person would be an active listener. Below is a discussion of the different listening styles based on the four quadrants.

Active Listener

What is an active listener? How do we know when we're around one? There are probably a number of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that give us a clue that we are around an active listener. What are some of the nonverbal behaviors?

Quite often there is head nodding, eye contact, perhaps even a leaning forward toward the speaker and the body positioning that goes along with this. For instance, an active listener often sits square with the person in front of them. These nonverbal behaviors seem to be an indication to the other person that we want him to talk more. It helps encourage a person to express himself. One may even have a questioning look or a look of anticipation that says to the other person, "Tell me more".

Verbal behaviors from the active listener may be reflective in nature or present a restructuring of the content. These statements in some way mirror what the person has said and the attempt of the listener to make sure he understands the content of what the person is trying to convey. The reflected statements could relate to feelings that are expressed by the person who is talking.

Another behavior that is sometimes used by the active listener is note-taking. There is a certain amount of controversy over note-taking. Some people feel it detracts from the flow of conversation and other people feel that it heightens it. The message to the talker often is, I think what you're saying is so important, I want to remember it so I am making a note of it. One woman goes to the doctor, for instance, and tells the doctor

something important about how she feels or where she hurts. Often that patient would like to have a doctor write it down so that it is not forgotten.

An active listener seems to accelerate the talking behavior of the person he's listening to. In fact, the talker may wish he hadn't said all those things before he's through.

Passive Listener

There are some people who listen but who are not particularly active about their listening. These are people who are comfortable to be around and people who do not demand a lot of talk nor do they talk about themselves in a particular situation. Sometimes they insert an, "Uh huh", or "Mm, I see", but other than that, they are not particularly active in the conversation. A passive listener may be someone you seek out when you do not want an answer. You may want someone to listen to you who will give you a chance to talk something through and to hear what you have to say.

Passive Non-Listener

An example of the passive non-listener may be the spouse who sits behind the paper and occasionally says, "Uh huh", keeping the other person talking for a long period of time. Eventually the speaker will say, "You are not listening to me". At that time, the spouse might repeat back to the speaker many of the things he said. This, of course, is quite frustrating. What is actually happening is the person is hearing but not listening.

Anyone who has been an elementary classroom teacher has had the experience of working with one child and having a second child come up behind and ask a question. The conversation may go something like this. "Teacher, I need some help with my math." Pretty soon the child tugs on the teacher's clothes and says, "Teacher, you're not listening to me". At that point the teacher turns around and says, "Yes, you said you needed some help with your

math. You go back and sit down and I'll be with you in a minute".

Occasionally you as a student have probably been in a class and tuned out what the instructor was saying. At this point, you have moved from being a passive listener to a passive non-listener. In a sense, you may be hearing what is being presented but you may not be actively attending to the presentation. It is also possible in conferencing situations, if one is tired or if one has had many conferences, that for short periods of time you tune out what is being said. Again, this is an instance of moving from passive listening to passive non-listening.

Listening for long periods of time is hard work. It is obvious that from time to time one will move from being an active listener to being a passive listener to being a passive non-listener.

Active Non-Listener

The active non-listener may be classififed into two types: 1) the Wipeout Artist, and 2) the Cocktail Party type. There is little if any communication going on when one or both people are being active non-listeners.

Have you ever been around a person who does not let you finish your story? The wipeout artist is one who seems to pick at the threads of the main theme. Consider the following:

Parent: Billy had the neatest thing happen to him on his way home from school.

Teacher: How does he go home from school?

Parent: Down Center Street and - - - - -

Teacher: Isn't that past the fire station?

Parent: Yes, and - - - - -

Teacher: Last year five of our boys said they wanted to be firemen when they grow up. What does Billy want to be?

Parent: A nuclear physicist.

Teacher: Isn't that cute? And to think he can't even spell it. What happened to him on the way home?

Parent: Well, he ran into this man who - - - - -

Teacher: I hope he said "excuse me". We stress good manner in our room. We have a unit on the magic words - Please and Thank You. I hope you notice the improvement at home.

With a little practice almost anyone can become an expert in active non-listening!!

It is very possible that in some of our conferences that the teacher may take off on one of the threads of a parent's story. It may be because that particular thread is something that interests the teacher and has to do with the way the child performs in the classroom. However, what happens is that the parent is never allowed the opportunity to tell the story that he intended to in the first place. That story may have been the parents methods of communicating an event related to the child's performance.

It is entirely possible that many conferences are of the cocktail party nature. By this we mean that one person, the teacher, has an agenda of things that he or she wants to talk about. At the same time the parent has an agenda of things that he or she would like to talk about. The conversation might go something like this:

Teacher: I'm so glad you could come. I've been wanting to talk to you about Billy.

Parent: I'm having trouble getting Billy to do his homework. He always wants to put it off, and we have frightful arguments around the home.

Teacher: He's been fighting on the playground. I've had to keep him in from recess twice this week.

Parent: I don't think he understands the new math. That's probably why he doesn't do this homework. I wish you could do something about it.

Teacher: Do you have any idea why he's started fighting so much? Does he ever talk about it at home? We just don't know what to do with him. It's getting to be a real problem.

Parent: We're having a real problem, too. We're open for any suggestions. This arguing is getting both his Dad and me upset.

Teacher: We at school want to cooperate in any way that we can. If you have any ideas about his fighting, call me, will you? It's sure been nice talking to you, and I'm so glad you could come. You're always welcome at school.

Parent: I'm happy to have met you. If you have any ideas how we can help at home, just call. We want to work closely with the school.

This type of conferring probably happens more often than one would like to believe. Both parent and teacher are trying to communicate and cooperate, but they are not taking the time to listen to what the other has to say. Little was accomplished, but both leave feeling that at least they have had their say about their problems.

It is conceivable that many of our conferences go something like the situation just presented. Whose responsibility is it to be the listener in that situation? It seems to us that the teacher, being the professional with training and skills, should be the one to be the listener. It is probably that neither problem will be solved until one of the issues is taken care of satisfactorily. In this case, the teacher might as well stop and take care of the new math problem or listen until the parent has a chance to express all the feelings about this particular situation. Another conference to discuss the fighting situations will have to be arranged.

People do not fit neatly into one of the four quadrants. Most move from quadrant to quadrant depending on the situation; however, there is probably a propensity to be consistently more of one type than another. A good way to analyze one's behavior is to tape record an interview and listen to it carefully.

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Exercise 1 - Roleplaying

The following situations are reproduced on cards and give to groups of 5-6 people. One or two take the role of parents, the rest are listeners.

The "listeners" cards should include one of the four listening types just discussed: Active, passive, active non-listening, passive non-listening. The parent should be unaware of the listener type. The point can be made in a 2-3 minute interaction with each parent/listener dyad. Include non-verbal clues in the roleplaying.

- The parent doesn't feel his child is getting enough language development in the classroom.
- Both parents have been called to a conference regarding their son and both attend. The conference is routine and normally used to discuss report cards. Each parent is concerned about a different part of the report.
- A parent shows up before school to discuss her daughter's sudden weariness.
- This parent has volunteered to help in the classroom, but has never done it before and has concerns about his ability.

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Exercise 2 - Discussing Listening Barriers

Kroth (1975) suggested several deterrents to teacher listening which follow. Discuss possible strategies to deal with these listening barriers. Assume they are related to conferences rather than group meetings.

Fatigue. Listening is work. If the mind or body is tired, then one will be a much poorer listener. We have all had the experience of sitting in lectures when we have been so tired that we cannot follow the speaker. If the teacher has a number of conferences in a row and she has really worked at listening, she will find her mind wandering toward the end of the day. A break should be scheduled to walk around and perhaps have a cup of coffee.

Strong Feelings. At times a particular child will cause strong feelings of anger because of some behavior. It is usually better to have a cooling-off period before scheduling a conference with the parents. This

may be a time that the teacher will want to talk to the school counselor about her own feelings. Other strong feelings, including sadness and happiness, on the part of the teacher will make it difficult for her to be a listener during a conference. It is usually wise to take stock of oneself before entering into a conference with any parent.

Words. The children's verse that ends "But words will never hurt me" is far from true. Consider for a moment the impact of the following:

"You're fired!"
"I'm pregnant."
"Your child's retarded."
"This is the Police."
"I love you."

The very words one uses or hears can make the pulse beat more rapidly, perspiration appears, and the pupils dilate. The teacher must carefully consider the words she uses in a conference and realize that certain words may deter or end listening on the part of the parent.

In discussing with parents of exceptional children the effects of the conference when a diagnostic label was applied to their child, many indicated that they heard nothing after being informed that their child was "retarded" or "emotionally disturbed". Parents apparently go through a series of psychological reactions such as shock, denial, guilt, rejection, blame, anger, embarrassment, and hostility before they accept the diagnosis and begin the productive steps of habilitation. The teacher who realizes that parents are having a difficult time in adapting to the reality of having a handicapped child will allow the parents every opportunity to talk over their feelings as these feelings relate to the child.

Realizing that parents may enter a conference with "strong feelings", the teacher should not be surprised if certain words used during the conference may cause the parents to stop listening actively. When this

happens, it may be expedient to suggest that parents take some time to think about what was discussed and to set a date in the near future to continue the conference.

Teacher Talk. High percentages of teacher "talk" time in a parent/teacher conference reduces the amount of listening time. A teacher once asked to have a tape of one of her parent conferences critiqued. By using a stopwatch it was determined that the teacher had talked eighty percent of the time during the conference. If as Wendell Johnson (1956, p. 23) says " . . . we come in time to realize that every speaker is his own most captive listener," then the teacher probably learned more about how she felt about the child than the parents learned about how they felt about the child. Basically, she spent very little time in listening to the parents and allowing them to listen to themselves discuss their child. There are times that a teacher needs to "listen" to herself by talking about a child, but it may be that this is best done by talking to a listener other than the parent. The above mentioned conference was probably more therapeutic for the teacher than for the parents.

The time, therefore, that the teacher engages in talking during a conference will reduce the time she can spend in listening. If listening is considered important, then it is wise to analyze the time spent in talking by the various participants during the conferences one holds.

Writing. Writing during a conference is a controversial subject. For some parents writing seems to increase the flow. Many professional people take notes during an interview - i.e., doctors, lawyers, etc. There also seems to be something about writing that helps the listener focus on the messages being relayed. Perhaps this is more true when the listener is fatigued than alert. Students sometimes say that taking notes during a boring lecture is one way of keeping attention focused on the subject.

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Specialized Listening

The art of listening takes practice. Professionals constantly need to remind themselves to be patient and listen. Sperry Corporation, in a pamphlet How Important It Is To Listen suggests that effective listeners do the following: 1) judge what is said, not how it is said; 2) listen optimistically; 3) don't jump to conclusions; 4) concentrate on the speaker; 5) stay with the speaker - don't jump ahead; 6) work at listening; 7) keep an open mind - hold emotions in check; and 8) accept the speaker's feelings.

The art of specialized listening also requires respect for parents and the role the parent plays. Nicholas Hobbs (1978) suggests " . . . Parents have to be recognized as special educators, the true experts on their children; and professional people . . . have to learn to be consultants to parents."

Now that we have introduced listening it is important to explore a few avenues of what to listen for when meeting with parents. Certainly the type of meeting will be a factor. A normally scheduled conference will have different dynamics than a group meeting or a meeting called because the parent is upset over a certain event.

The following situations provide examples for consideration of the extent to which listening will be required.

- Many parents will come to a conference prepared with questions or concerns. It will be wise to listen carefully and offer information when it is requested. Jumping in with teacher concerns may leave the parent even more frustrated (you've added another problem) or may result in a loss of time because the parent is not listening.
- A teacher's good intentions may conflict with the family perception of the child. Ask for a parent's opinion regarding new ideas for change. Be sure to listen for their priorities and concerns.

- Consider the teacher who has called the parent to come in because he thinks the child would benefit from some help at home with spelling. The divorced father who has custody begins the conference by trying to relate how difficult it is for him to get the kids to school on time. The teacher who is listening will realize immediately that his conference intentions should be tabled for awhile and perhaps for the entire conference.
- In a group situation the effective teacher realizes immediately that one parent is having trouble accepting that the group believes in early sex education in school. This particular parent is shy and reserved and may have said very few words, but the concern is there. The teacher might bring up the alternate view himself and play the devil's advocate.

Listening for Strengths

This specialized skill will help disorganized, confused and frustrated parents probably more than any other technique teachers might have at their disposal. Parents should know that the positive side of their situation is recognized and valuable. Without even knowing a family history, the teacher can, with very few words, make a distraught parent feel better.

Example A - How To Listen For Strengths

Take for example the divorced father that the teacher has asked to come for a conference regarding home help with spelling. The father opens with an apology for his child being late many mornings. What comments might be made to make him feel a little more successful as a single parent?

1. Mornings are sure hard on parents. (This says all parents have trouble.)
2. Your daughter seems to tune right in when she gets here. (This relieves the father. He may have felt guilty about the effect being late had on his daughter.)
3. Do you even get time to read the newspaper in the morning? (This

suggests you undersatnd the father has little time to himself.)

4. I always have sort of a "get your mind set for school time" for all the children. That way when some are late, they haven't missed anything. (This suggests other children are occasionally late, not just his.)
5. Your time traveling in the car here must be relaxing. Your daughter seems to enjoy that visiting time. (This suggests that the father is valuable to his daughter. It will help him realize that the time can be used productively.)

Any of these comments, and there are certainly more, reflect that the teacher listened to the father's frustration and reflected the strengths. Most parents are good parents and need some recognition. Parents in situations which are disruptive need even more support for what they do right.

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Exercise 3 - Listing Strengths

Each student has come into contact with a parent who seems to have many insurmountable problems and disruptions. They should take some time to reflect on this parent and list strengths. They should then list possible comments that can be made to reinforce those strengths. (Note: This is a valuable exercise to do with children who seem to have few positive qualities up front!)

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DO I REALLY KNOW YOU??

Sometimes we think we know someone because we live or work together. Often we do not take the time to communicate with each other. Following are a number of questions to answer about someone (relative or fellow worker) you think you know. Answer the questions and then interview that person. Give yourself 2 points for full credit or 1 point for partial credit on each answer. Good luck!

		Credit
1.	Favorite color will be _____	_____
2.	Favorite food(s) will be _____	_____
3.	Favorite relaxation activities will be - a. _____	_____
	b. _____	_____
	c. _____	_____
4.	Pet peeve or aggravation will be _____	_____
5.	Birthday (day, month & year) is _____	_____
6.	Name of supervisor or teacher is _____	_____
7.	Size of one article of clothing is _____	_____
8.	Favorite beverage is _____	_____
9.	Most memorable trip was _____	_____
10.	Major worries are - a. _____	_____
	b. _____	_____
11.	Two good friends are - a. _____	_____
	b. _____	_____
12.	Last movie attended was _____	_____
13.	Last book read was _____	_____
14.	Favorite candy is _____	_____
15.	Favorite flowers are _____	_____
16.	Major strengths are - a. _____	_____
	b. _____	_____
17.	Biggest heroes are - a. _____	_____
	b. _____	_____
18.	Upon winning a million dollar lottery this person would _____	
	_____	
	_____	_____
19.	If this person could have any job he/she wanted it would be _____	
	_____	_____
20.	The last time you hugged or kissed this person was _____	_____
21.	Bonus Question of your choice _____	
	_____	
	_____	_____

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UNIT 4 - LISTENING SKILLS

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UNIT 5

CONFERENCING SKILLS

Introduction

As seen on the Mirror Model most parents will participate in conferences making this one very useful way to promote involvement and interaction. On the surface this task would seem to involve little skill. For the teacher who values parents, however, skills in addition to active listening need to be developed.

Kroth (1972) suggests that basically there are two kinds of conferences that teachers generally have with parents. One is for information sharing and the other is for problem-solving. Kroth's article is included with this module and due to its comprehensive content will not be summarized here. However, some elaboration and materials have been completed since the article (mainly through the University of New Mexico/ Albuquerque Public School Parent Involvement Center) and these are summarized.

A conference checklist provides structure and simplifies attention to detail. It serves as a technique to document the conference and should be left in the child's file complete with notes. Individual teachers should improve on the checklist according to their situation.

Insert Fig. 7 Conference Checklist about here

PRECONFERENCE

Notification of the conference is the first rapport building step a teacher uses and should be considered with care. If the parent can be reached by phone, the purpose of the conference should be explained

Fig. 7

Conference Checklist

PRE-CONFERENCE

_____ 1. NOTIFY
- PURPOSE, PLACE, TIME, LENGTH OF TIME ALLOTTED

_____ 2. PREPARE
- REVIEW CHILD'S FOLDER
- GATHER EXAMPLES OF WORK
- PREPARE MATERIALS

_____ 3. PLAN AGENDA

_____ 4. ARRANGE ENVIRONMENT
- COMFORTABLE SEATING
- ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS

CONFERENCE

_____ 1. WELCOME
- ESTABLISH RAPPORT

_____ 2. STATE
- PURPOSE
- TIME LIMITATIONS
- NOTE TAKING
- OPTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

_____ 3. ENCOURAGE
- INFORMATION SHARING
- COMMENTS
- QUESTIONS

_____ 4. LISTEN
- PAUSE ONCE IN AWHILE!
- LOOK FOR VERBAL AND NONVERBAL CUES
- QUESTIONS

_____ 5. SUMMARIZE

_____ 6. END ON A POSITIVE NOTE

POST-CONFERENCE

_____ 1. REVIEW CONFERENCE WITH CHILD, IF APPROPRIATE

_____ 2. SHARE INFORMATION WITH OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL, IF NEEDED

_____ 3. MARK CALENDAR FOR PLANNED FOLLOW-UP

thoroughly. Phone calls can be anxiety producing and many parents assume the call means something is wrong. Consider some other pitfalls: a parent is reached who does not speak English; there is no phone and this is the initial conference; the parent does not mind coming to see you, but has no transportation. Be sure the time for the conference is convenient and let parents know how long it will last.

Attendance of both parents. Reynolds and Birch (1977) among others, feel that parent-teacher interaction and even parent-school interaction will be greatly improved when both parents attend conferences. As is discussed in the unit on listening we all hear what we want to hear and this is determined by many individual values. The chances for distortion are less when there are two listeners.

Seligman (1979) suggests that a spouse may be reluctant to attend because it increases her anxieties about the child. The matter should be dropped if there is considerable resistance. However, every effort should be made to indicate the importance of two parents attending. A teacher might indicate willingness to come in very early if that will facilitate both parents being able to attend.

Evidence regarding different perceptions of mothers and fathers is found in mental retardation literature. Gumz and Gubrium (1972) found that mothers exhibit more emotional reactions than fathers but Hersch (1970) found that fathers exhibit more knowledge relative to the handicapping conditions. Peck and Stephens (1960) found that fathers may set the tone or pattern for acceptance or rejection of the child in the home.

Price-Bonham and Addison (1978) concluded in their major review of fathers with mentally retarded children that the father's lack of involvement with the child is a serious concern. There are a few studies,

reviewed in the article, that suggest which factors contribute to a father's attitude. For example, if the mentally retarded child is a boy, the father's disappointment may be in the future inability of the child to "stand up for himself". By not meeting cultural aspirations the son deprives the father of feelings of pride in achievement. When the child is unable to perform as expected, the father may become hostile and abusive.

Currently mothers are still viewed as the primary caretakers of any child. This may be self imposed or delegated, or it may be because large numbers of exceptional children live in single parent families. Nevertheless, mothers of handicapped children need support, both psychological and physical.

Preparation. It goes without saying that the teacher needs to be very aware and in tune with the child. Strengths and positive points should be as readily available as information in areas needing improvement.

A planned agenda is suggested on the checklist whereby sequence or important points can be noted. The teacher will, of course, remember the value of active listening and be prepared to abandon an agenda.

Environmental arrangement. The physical setting for the conference is important in that it sets the tone for the conference. Where the teachers sits is an important factor. The teacher should sit at the same level as the parent. Although kindergarten-size chairs are a little uncomfortable most parents don't mind and realize the unavailability of lounge chairs to the school system.

The teacher should try not to sit behind the desk as this may be a barrier to comfortable interpersonal exchange of information. At the same time the teacher should be aware of individual needs for personal space.

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Assignment 1 - Father and Sibling Involvement

Occasionally articles pop up which suggest ways to get fathers and even siblings involved with an exceptional child. The class should compile a list of successful (or unsuccessful) methods. In addition to the literature, interviews with teachers, parents, church, and community organizations should provide interesting information. The final list should provide concrete, realistic, and usable ideas for any teacher interested in involving fathers - with the ultimate goal of making the care for the child simpler and easier at home.

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CONFERENCE

Welcome

Clear your head and take a deep breath before you move in, it will help you focus on the conference. Be sure it is evident you are pleased to see the parent. If possible, go to the parents. Be prompt - if some unexpected delay occurs, be sure the parents are aware of it. Touch base with them - don't just let them sit and wait.

Establishing rapport is important. "Conferences normally begin with a certain amount of small talk about the weather, inflation, or an event in the news. This conversation is to be expected and serves the function of warming up or settling in before more serious business if pursued." (Seligman, 1979). A positive comment about the child or a classroom anecdote is a good way to begin the conference on a non-threatening note. Be sensitive to the parents' needs and wishes. Allow parents some control over time and agenda.

Conference Purpose

After establishing rapport, lay the groundwork of the conference

structure including: 1) purpose of the conference; 2) amount of time allotted for the conference; 3) approval for teacher note-taking; and 4) encouragement for questions or additions from the parents. Suggest that they are welcome to take notes and provide pen and paper.

Encouragement

Even highly educated parents may hesitate to admit they don't understand terminology and teachers are reminded that the constant use of educational language will not aid in accomplishing good interaction (see for example, Dembinski & Mauser, 1977). The most well meaning teachers fall into their jargon without thinking.

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Exercise 2 - Changing Jargon Into English

Reword the following in language a parent would readily understand. If this task is difficult, then diagram the concept. Again, don't be afraid to give away "trade" secrets.

-It will be necessary to work on the child's short term auditory memory skills.

-During the year we will spend some time on affective development for the entire class using sociodrama, bibliotherapy and other awareness techniques.

-Cognitive behavior modification skills have worked well in the past with children who appear to be lacking in self-responsibility.

-Your child is now at a stage of formal operational thinking and I hope to expand on this using the latest computer components we have available at this school.

-John's strengths lie in his unique learning style which includes kinesthetic manipulation.

-We feel that Sara's autistic-like self stimulation activities are necessary. We hope to be able to use this behavior in a less distractive manner so as to enhance her awareness.

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Nonverbal Communication

The ability to understand nonverbal communication is a valuable tool when working with parents. Teacher-trainers are encouraged to review Egan's (1976) book regarding interpersonal nonverbal and paralinguistic behaviors.

Although it can be very helpful to watch the parent for nonverbal cues, it's equally important not to misinterpret these cues. The same behavior manifested by two people may have vastly different meanings. Skilled interviewers often use perception checks to convey meaning. A quick activity that dramatizes our reliance on nonverbal cues is found in Milton Seligman's book, Strategies for helping parents of exceptional children, 1979, p. 121.

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Exercise 3 - Nonverbal Communication

The purpose of this exercise is to provide some idea of how much one depends on nonverbal cues in the interpretation of verbal messages.

Choose a partner from among your fellow group members. Sit facing your partner. Close your eyes. Have a two- or three-minute conversation but keep your eyes closed during the entire conversation.

Share your feelings during the conversation. What nonverbal cues

did you miss the most? In what ways was the conversation stilted?

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Active Listening and Responding

The importance of listening has been addressed in an earlier unit, however, a quick review here is appropriate. Reich (1972) notes the characteristics of a good listener in his definition: "Listening is not a mechanical activity. It is hard work and requires deep concentration, patience and practice. It involves hearing the way things are said, and the tone used while observing the speaker's gestures. In listening attentively, one must hear what is not said, what is hinted at, what may be held back, or what lies beneath the surface. We must learn to listen with our third ear."

Skills useful in listening are: 1) paraphrase - stating in your own way what the speaker's remark conveys to you, "Is this . . . an accurate understanding of your ideas?"; 2) perception check - a statement of what you perceive to be the other person's inner state. It conveys, "This is how I understand your feelings. Am I correct?"; 3) minimal encouragement - provides limited structure, conveys teacher's interest, reinforces parent's communication, yet does not interfere with parent's rights: "Mm-hm", "Could you tell me more?", "Oh?", "Then?", "And?", "Uh-huh", the repetition of one or two key words, simple restatement of the parent's last comment (Seligman, 1979); 4) awareness of nonverbal behavior - nonverbal cues often more accurately reflect one's inner state than words.

End of Conference Summary

Using any notes you've taken, recap the information shared, any responsiblities assigned, and any decisions made. Be sure to check with the parent for their verification of your summary and leave enough time

for closing so it isn't rushed.

End on a Positive Note

Set a date for follow-up, if needed. Encourage parents to call if there are any further questions or concerns.

POST-CONFERENCE

Either the parent or the teacher can review with the child if appropriate. As soon as possible and also where appropriate share information with other school personnel. Communication breakdown at this point is often the cause of much repetition for the parent. For example, a parent may be asked for the same case history by several school people.

Be sure to follow through on any commitments made during the conference. This builds confidence and trust on the part of the parent.

Dealing With Stressful Situations

Of course, not all conferences are for information sharing. Some are the result of problems, either real or mistaken, and may require a few survival techniques. The following is taken directly from The Hand-Book of Strategies for Parent Involvement.

Tips for Dealing with Aggression

Learning and practicing effective communication skills in conferences and other interactions with parents is most certainly the foundation for developing successful, cooperative relationships with parents. However, even the most skilled, conscientious teachers will encounter difficult situations involving parents who are experiencing feelings of anger, frustration or confusion that manifest themselves in aggressive behavior. Real, misinterpreted, or miscommunicated concerns on the part of the parent may, at times, be directed at the teacher.

When this happens, and it probably will if it hasn't already, there are some useful techniques for responding productively in a potentially

destructive situation that we would like to share. These techniques, like those preventative strategies discussed earlier, must be learned and practiced in order to be useful in stressful situations.

First of all, when faced with aggressive individuals, don't give in to your first reaction - it is often wrong. Our natural response to an attack which is to defend and to become defensive is usually counter-productive in a conflict situation. Stop yourself and think. Then, put into practice some of these techniques.

1. Listen - use your active listening skills to focus on the feeling content of what the parent says. Be sure your non-verbal behavior is congruent with your active listening stance.

2. Write down what they say - take a pencil and paper and list the complaints or points that are being made. It is nearly impossible to stay angry at someone who is earnestly jotting down each item.

3. When they slow down, ask them what else is bothering them - be sincere in your attempt to make sure you have gotten everything down until you . . .

4. Exhaust their list of complaints - then,

5. Ask them to clarify any specific complaints that are too general - it is facilitative to encourage parents to be as exact as possible and to break generalities down to observable behaviors or specific points. As holds true in working with children, it is much more productive to have a precise description of the behavior before attempting to consider possible remedies or alternatives for action.

6. Show them the list and ask if it is complete - the effort made to cover every single concern insures that no new material will sidetrack the movement toward solutions once that process begins.

7. Ask them for suggestions for solving any of the problems - as in any conflict resolution or problem-solving process, solutions generated by the owner of the problem are much more likely to be accepted and acted upon.

8. Write down the suggestions - again, your seriousness in noting down on paper the parents' thoughts is very effective in defusing anger and hostility. It also facilitates the process of evaluating and choosing a possible plan for action. Having the complaints and suggestions down in black and white where both parties can see exactly what has been said eliminates the probability of later misunderstanding on these issues. We all, as is our human nature, listen with selective perception and, oftentimes, we have heard what we wanted to hear rather than what was actually said. Also, having the actual words on paper lends itself to clarification of any terminology or vague phrasing.

9. As much as possible, mirror their body posture during this process - this is an old counseling technique that can be effective if used judiciously. It is kind of like dancing -- mirroring someone's body posture transmits the nonverbal message, "I'm with you".

10. As they speak louder, you speak softer - this usually has a calming effect on the individual.

If one practices the above mentioned "Do's" sincerely, the chances are good that the hostility or aggression will be effectively defused and reduced.

However, there are a few additional cautions that fall into the "Don't" category that are worth reviewing. DON'T:

1. Argue - countering parents' complaints with explanation, justification or similar complaints will not move the situation toward resolution. Parents who are experiencing strong feelings will usually not hear your words and respond to them, but will rather jump right back to their own thoughts and continue in the same vein. An escalation of the conflict by your returned arguments will usually only complicate the situation and heighten feelings.

2. DON'T Defend or become defensive - this is perhaps one of the most difficult to avoid when someone is attacking. Through practice and self-discipline, however, it's possible to deal with parents' angry feelings or aggressive stances without internalizing them as directed at you personally. Experience indicates that resisting the desire to jump to the defense of oneself, one's colleagues, or school,

immediately, is one of the very hardest things to do and requires much patience, practice and understanding.

3. DON'T Promise things you can't produce - there is a tendency in all of us to want to make things okay. However, making promises that we can't keep usually results in a loss of trust and confidence on the part of parents.

4. DON'T Own problems that belong to others - it is a reflection of your confidence in parents' abilities to generate alternatives, choose viable solutions, and follow-through on them, if you leave the ownership of the problem where it belongs. This certainly doesn't mean you shouldn't be caring, concerned, and participate in the problem-solving process with the parents.

5. DON'T Raise your voice - this is another place where escalation can easily occur and perhaps result in a shouting match.

6. DON'T Belittle or minimize the problem - take the parents seriously even if the problem doesn't seem as critical to you. If parents are feeling strongly enough to be at school, they think it is important. You may find out there has been a misunderstanding or that the presenting problem only opens the door for some more serious concerns.

Overall, remember that many other things may be going on in parents' lives and you may be just catching the flak of the general frustration of individuals who are unable to cope with the world at that particular time. Practice, patience, and sincere listening are usually the most effective antidotes in these difficult situations.

The Unexpected Conference

It is quite possible that the teacher may be left with the task of explicitly delineating the limitations and handicaps of the child for the first time. This may be because the parents could not handle the realization before and did not "listen". It may be that other professionals were remiss in informing parents. Or it may be that school is the ultimate test of limitations.

No matter the cause, teachers may feel desperate, frustrated, or even angry that they have had to deliver this "bad news". Teachers need to know their own values regarding exceptionality. They need to understand family dynamics and avoid becoming angry and personally threatened when the parent seems to blame them. They need to feel secure in their professional ability to ultimately help the child. Finally, they need to be ready.

UNIT 5 - CONFERENCING SKILLS

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UNIT 6

INFORMATION SHARING STRATEGIES

One of the advantages of having a limited number of children, i.e., small pupil-teacher ratio, is that teachers can share infromation with the parents on a more frequent basis, than if the teacher is responsible for large numbers of children. In addition, there are several ways for all teachers, regardless of class size, to share information.

Newsletters - teachers should know something about the potential use of newsletters and how they might be constructed. Parents are often willing to help on newsletters. Not only is this a good way of sharing coming events with parents, and past accomplishments, but some teachers have used this vehicle to provide parents with tips on things they can do at home to help their children. Parents have been provided with suggestions on Christmas gifts, reading material, suggestions for family field trips and ideas for summer.

Insert Fig. 8 about here on Newsletters

Handbooks - most large school districts have Special Education handbooks explaining basic procedures and programs. Special and regular classroom teachers who have learned to prepare their own handbooks have gained a giant step in public relations. Parents are apt to read and use an individually prepared document while they often ignore the district-wide handbook.

Teachers use class handbooks to explain how and when they can be contacted. They also explain any special practices the teachers may be using such as timeout rooms or reinforcement techniques.

Fig. 8

MONTHLY NEWSLETTERS

1. Current Events.
   Include positive reinforcement in writing if possible.
2. Current Achievements of Students.
   "Spot light" a student whenever possible.
3. Calendar Events.
   Special parties, trips or projects, dates to remember.
4. Photographs or Art Work.
   This creates a high interest level for parents and students.
5. Samples of Students' Good Work.
   This can emphasize the curriculum.
6. Individual and Class Goals.
   This can highlight specific problem areas for parent follow-up (behavioral, educational).
7. Instructional and Education Information.
   These can be reminders or "highlights" from extensive information on these areas found in the Handbook.
   a. Bus Rules and Procedures.
   b. Playground Rules.
   c. Classroom Rules.
   d. Library Rules and Procedures.
   e. Basic School Rules.
   f. Utilization of Parent Helpers.
   g. Parental Reinforcement Techniques.
   h. Classroom Behavior Management Techniques.
   i. Parental Coping Skills.
   j. P.E. Activities or Special Trips.
   k. Supplies Needed (updated).
8. Hand-Outs For Special Needs.
   These could be included in the Newsletter or as separate articles.
   a. Samples of Books For Parents.
   b. Games At Home For Children.
   c. Where To Take Children For Field Trips.
   d. Clubs That May Be Subscribed To.
   e. Summer Activities Available.
   f. Brief Information Sheets.
      1) Helping With Homework.
      2) Spare Time Work Available.
      3) Preparing Special Cook Books.
      4) Helps On Developing Self-Esteem.
      5) Hobbies For The Handicapped.
      6) Christmas Suggestions.
      7) How To Have A Party.
      8) Tips On Preparing For Trips.

Insert Fig. 9 about here on Handbooks

The value of class handbooks is that teachers who really know their parents can write them at appropriate reading levels. Teachers use handbooks for a variety of purposes, sometimes including information on community services and organizations for parents to join.

Daily/Weekly Report Cards - there have been so many studies and so much written about the positive effects of using a frequent reporting system that one hesitates to belabor the obvious. Yet many teachers do not use this strategy in communicating with parents and do not use parents as reinforcers for their childrens progress in the classroom. Any beginning unit, module or class on parent/teacher interaction should include a section on the uses and abuses of daily or weekly reporting systems.

If teachers are in classrooms (either as practice teachers or in paid positions) assigning development and use of the system of daily/weekly report cards gives the professor an opportunity to provide feedback during the initial stages. The systems do not need to be complex. In fact, it is useful to show teachers how simple the system can be and still provide growth experiences for children.

Olson (1981) and Dominguez (1982) used the strategy of teaching teachers to use daily reporting systems. They found that teachers were able to increase their contacts with parents significantly in a short time.

Telephone Contacts - the telephone, like the daily reporting system, is a way for the parent and teacher to be in frequent communication. Any parent will report that a note or a phone call from school is enough to send chills up the spine. This is because the typical message from

Fig. 9

PARENT HANDBOOK

1. Program Objectives: Goals for Students and Teachers
   - A. Academic Skills
   - B. Self-Help Skills
   - C. Behavior Management
   - D. Vocational - Work Study Skills
   - E. Self-Concept
   - F. Parent Participation
   - G. School-Parent Communications - Open Door Policy

2. School Personnel -- Anyone associated with the students in your class

3. Directory of Telephone Numbers
   - A. Office Numbers
   - B. Classroom Number
   - C. Bus Driver's Number

4. Program Design
   - A. Classroom Structure
   - B. Behavior Management
   - C. Teacher Philosophy

5. Classroom Setting
   - A. Class Population
   - B. Classroom Climate
   - C. Types of Special Education Class - exceptionality and level
   - D. Teacher Aide Involvement
   - E. Room Arrangement (simple diagram)

6. Class Schedule
   - A. Daily Schedule - early dismissal if any
   - B. Bus Schedule
   - C. Abbreviated Day Schedule
   - D. Curriculum - special days, P.E., library, counseling, subject matter
   - E. Types of Management Procedures - special rules

7. How Parent Can Help
   - A. Classroom Tutors
   - B. Room Mothers
   - C. Field Trip Chaperones

8. Suggested Reading List for Parents of Exceptional Children

9. Communication Services Proviced
   - A. Telephone - include when is the best time for receiving calls at school, reasons for calling such as illness, absences, problems at home
   - B. Good News/Smiling Face Cards - random
   - C. Daily/Weekly Reports - informing parents of good news and/or problems needing follow-up at home
   - E. Monthly/Bimonthly Newsletters

F. Home-Visits- contracts
G. Parent Groups
H. I.E.P. Conference- planning
I. Progress Reports- grading system, conference dates
J. Rewards/Certificates
K. Class Handouts- class work, special instructional packets, special notes
L. Individual Student Behavior Goals and Classroom Goals
M. Daily Task Work (i.e., informal daily progress)

10. General items - depending upon the age of the students and type of program
    A. Open House
    B. Room Mothers
    C. Field Trips
    D. School or Class Special Activities
        1) Cafeteria lunches
        2) Popcorn sales
        3) Supply lists - materials needed
        4) Transportation information

11. Specific Special Education Class Policies
    A. Shortened Day
    B. Extra Meetings Schedules - if necessary
    C. Special Testing
    D. Time-Out Room
    E. Material Rewards
    F. Study Carrells
    G. Different Techniques Used
    H. Agencies in the Community for Special Assistance

school, other than at routine times, is bad news. While this reaction probably will not be turned around in the near future, teacher educators can help make some changes.

There are times when most children do not have parents at home during the day because of work schedules, and therefore do not have parents who can come to school without some notice, so teachers will need to explore all systems of communication. Chapman and Howard (1982) have been exploring the use of telephone answering services in schools. This has exciting possibilities.

Miscellaneous Handbooks - there are a variety of speciality handbooks that teachers might develop in a course on parent/teacher interactions. For example, teachers have developed booklets for parents on games that parents can play with children to teach a variety of skills. Simple to complex recipes have been put into cookbooks for parents. Cooking can involve measuring skills as well as producing a material reward if the job is carried out correctly.

Notebooks - on community services, summer programs, bibliotherapy, magazines, books and record clubs for children, Christmas gifts, party games might be developed in a course. This information is usually welcomed by parents.

Basic Helpful Facts - family characteristics provide valuable information for the teacher who is trying to involve parents to some extent in their child's educational program. The information need not be of a personal nature, but basic facts are valuable:

1. Number and ages of siblings at home;
2. Parents in home;
3. Relatives living in the home;

4. Parental employment;
5. Where a child goes after school (some children who are bussed to a sitter do not get notes home and consideration should be given to mailing the most relevant);
6. Phone at home;
7. Method by which the parents would PREFER getting information.

Professional Services and Information Sharing Strategies

The section deals with two different aspects regarding family use of professional services for their handicapped child, or for any child. The first addresses the extent to which parents seek out professionals and the second concerns the results of parent or family/professional interaction.

Denial was suggested previously as a defense mechanism that parents use in order to avoid anxiety. Seligman (1979) suggests that denial is evident when parents continually seek evaluations from various sources. Seligman, who believes that denial is but one stage in the various stages of mourning, says that the activity of searching for more favorable diagnosis and prognosis is necessary for some parents of a handicapped child. These actions might indeed bring about an alternative and favorable method of intervention. Searching also gives the parent a chance to "do something" - it seems to offer an indirect way of being helpful to the child who seems so helpless.

When the parent ceases listening to the new evaluations and continues casting about in order to avoid a realistic appraisal of the child, teachers should be alerted. When denial does not dissipate the parent probably needs professional help.

Doernberg (1978) cautions further about the effects treatment can have on the family as a whole. She states that there seems to be two incontrovertible assumptions regarding treatment: "First, the habilitation of the child is paramount, and therefore, any efficacious treatment should be used and will be good for the child, and, second what is good for the child is good for the family." From Doernberg's clinical experience the effects on the family of too much treatment can be negative. She suggests that when the model for interpersonal relationships among family members if one of illness, each member can suffer (including the handicapped child) when treatment is given priority.

One of the ways a teacher can help in altering the patterns families get into when treatment is "in control" would be to offer one or two group meetings (or newsletters) related to the topic. For example, teach parents that professionals tend to dwell on negatives. Help them not only to think positively about the child and understand strengths, but to be able to teach other people to think positively. Help parents with a system which will enable them to make their way comfortably through the "helping services". Be sure that parents understand how labels are used and the difficulty in changing labels.

While professionals should be alert to the needs that parents have for help in navigating the system, they also need to be attuned to the possibilities that parents can be overwhelmed by too much help. When the average family has a child there is a period of time when doctors, nurses, grandparents and assorted friends attend to the newborn. After that period about the only time parents get advice is when the in-laws feel compelled to intervene.

If the child is handicapped, however, the parents may find themselves inundated by advice from many people. Seldom do the professionals coordinate their efforts. While the idea of a case manager has been proposed often, it has not been propagated. In some instances, parents take over the role of case manager, but old habits die slowly. The view of doctors, psychologists and many other professionals as authority figures is still strong in our culture. Hobbs (1978) recommends that parents be regarded as the special educators and that professionals should assume the role of consultants to them. Most of us could agree with the recommendation philosophically, but not behaviorally. For instance, it is interesting to talk to professionals who become parents of handicapped children, or who become patients. Authoritarian individuals become submissive, objective people become subjective, and intellectuals become emotional. Even when one knows appropriate ways of being assertive and using adult strategies of communication, there is no assurance that this appropriate behavior will carry over to the conferences and staffing when one's own child is involved.

In trying to be more sensitive to the vast number of pressures and persons who impinge on the lives of parents, the form in Figure 10 developed. The resources listed on the column on the left hand side of the form are not exhaustive. Others should and could be included. In a family retreat with parents of young deaf/blind children the form was passed out to parents to complete. It was found that some parents were using as many as 20 resources. Many of them were seeing as many as 12 professionals. One father reported that they were being advised by 6 different medical doctors because of the nature of his child's condition. He said, "I'm only a truck mechanic. What should I do when they give me

different opinions and advice?".

Put Figure 10 about here - Professional Services

Often the professionals will want the parents to do something. The amount of time may soon be prohibitive, and sometimes the advice is contradictory from one professional to another. In the causal survey conducted with the parents of young deaf/blind children, it was found that teachers received the highest ratings on support and information. This was interesting because teachers often complain that parents do not follow through with their recommendations. However, this finding agrees with Seligman (1979) who reports that parents usually feel very positive toward their child's teacher.

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Assignment

Have class members interview a parent of an exceptional child. During the interview ask the parents to fill out the form in Figure 10. Aggregate the data for the group. Look at differences that may occur between various categories and/or various age groups.

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Sharing Information Through Community Services

Since the teacher is usually the closest professional to the parent, the teacher often may be the person the parent turns to when they need additional help. Most communities have a variety of services which differ in cost, type and variety of professional help, type of population to be served and time of service. Because the teacher serves a particular population, it is useful for the teacher to know the community services

Fig. 10

Name (Optional) _____

PARENT INFORMATION & SUPPORT SYSTEM SUMMARY

Age of Child _____

Type of Exceptionality _____

Parents of exceptional children receive information and support from a wide variety of sources. Some of this assistance is beneficial and some may not be helpful. Since you became aware of your child's exceptionality, which of these sources have you used or are you using? Rate their usefulness or value to you and your family.

A = Excellent
B = Above average
C = Average
D = Below average
F = Failure

Resources	now seeing	have seen in past	who informed you	rate quality of information	rate quality of support	Comments
Family doctor						
Pediatrician						
Psychologist						
Psychiatrist						
Ophthalmologist						
Nurse						
Social Worker						
Child's teacher						
Preschool Personnel						
Diagnostician						
Clergy						
Occupational therapist						
Speech therapist						
Physical therapist						
Audiologist						
Mobility trainer						
National or local organizations (ACLD, ARC)						
School administrators						
Books, magazine articles						
Other parents						
Others						

and how to access them.

In large cities there may be hundreds of agencies. Books, listing the agencies and some descriptive data, are usually available for a nominal fee. While these books may be helpful, they often present a shopping list that is much too long.

Skills that teachers should possess include how to locate services and how to help parents use them. Following are some suggestions for teachers.

1. Learn to use the Yellow Pages in the telephone book. Often by calling major parent organizations such as the Association for Retarded Citizens, information can be obtained for parents. These organizations deal regularly with information sharing and dissemination. But contact should be made personally before the advice is passed on to parents.

2. Learn to analyze parent needs. Major needs of parents which are psychological or supportive in orientation may be found in some specific areas of the city. In another area of the city the major medical, or material needs can be met. If children need clothing the teachers should know where to refer the parents, and the procedure for obtaining the service. But teachers are advised to try out the services on behalf of one parent prior to suggesting the service to all parents.

3. Parents may need to learn how to ask for help. Teachers seldom do parents a favor by calling a service for them or making an appointment with an agency for them. The rate of follow through is low. Parents can be taught to call, what to say and how to say it. The teacher can accompany the parent if this is desired but people need to learn how to negotiate the systems - not have it done for them.

4. Other teachers are major resources. Teachers who have similar populations and who have been in the system can be a great deal of help. They often know the appropriate places to go, and who to see. Some school systems have school social workers who have a network of referral sources.

5. Once again, actually visiting community services can be helpful. A visit to selected agencies can give the teacher a chance to look over the facilities and meet the key personnel. If it is an agency that the teacher uses often, then there will probably be some mutual benefits. Referral source personnel will probably welcome an opportunity to meet with those persons who are doing the referring. It might be a time to clarify which type of parents can be helped the most and what happens when the agency is not the appropriate resource. Many community services depend upon community support. Therefore, they are pleased to have visitors.

   If the teacher is just beginning and has not used the particular agency, she or he may want to take a data collection form that is found in Figure 11. This provides the teacher with some systematic fact finding procedures.

Insert Figure 11 about here

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6. Parents can be a good resource, because parents who have been there often help those who are going. It is also easier and more appropriate for parents to make direct recommendations than it is for teachers. Usually teachers are supposed to offer a number of names for a parent to select from, but parents can be more specific. The news gets around, if the parents are provided the opportunity, of which dentists are willing to work on handicapped children, or where to go for specific help, or the names of people who will extend themselves.

   The Developmental Disabilitites Planning Council in New Mexico has funded a Parent Support Network system. One of the purposes is to provide key people, parents and professionals, in a community with information on ways to get information. The information is available but it is a matter of getting it to people when it is needed.

7. Newspapers can be a good source. Teachers may want to start a clipping file. This might be a 3 x 5 index card file or it might be a scrapbook. Most newspapers report meetings of groups as a public service. Usually these meetings tell something about the type of meeting, when it will be held and where. Pasting this on a card and filing it away will provide the teacher with an instant retrieval system.

Fig. 11

Community Services Checklist

NAME:

Phone:

Address:

Director:

HOURS:

AGES SERVED:

FEE:

SERVICES:

REFERRAL PROCEDURE:

SPECIAL NOTES:

Newspapers often carry human interest stories about specialized groups. If the teacher collects these articles, the information contained can be made available to parents when it is needed.

It is a good idea for the teacher to become familiar with the Community Services and the personnel before referring parents. A phone call can tell one a great deal. Frequently at the Parent Involvement Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, people call and ask questions like, "What do you do?". It is never resented and usually leads to help for the caller.

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Assignment

If practical, the class should be divided into groups of 3 or 4 with the task of finding appropriate services for 5 different children. Each group should become "the parents" in search of the best for their child. It should be assumed that all "parents" have just moved into this community. Each group should develop a notebook containing facts about the child, including test results if available. The final selection of the notebook should include comprehensive steps any parents with similar circumstances could pursue in order to get help. Each group should actually go through the process including interviews with relevant agencies, schools, etc., to get first hand information.

Child A: Billy. Age 14. Single parent family - mother head of household. 3 brothers, ages 2, 9, 11. Mother works days. Father in another state. Income minimal. No close relatives. Billy has been in classroom for learning problems since third grade. He is very bright, but scores only 110 on WISC. Billy is beginning to have some emotional problems.

Child B: Angela, age 1½. Not walking or talking. Only child. Both parents work. No previous diagnosis or information from physicians available. Socio-economic status is lower-middle class.

Child C: Chad, age 6. One older sister, age 9. Both parents at home, Mother does not work outside home. Chad is identified as Down's Syndrome, but he is also physically handicapped. The family income is $15,000 per year.

The class as a whole should then consider the detrimental effects on the family with a child in the following therapeutic situation:

Child D: Jimmy, age 7. Both parents work. There are two older children, ages 9 and 11, and one younger, age 4. Jimmy needs, according to professionals, two 30 minute sessions with an occupational therapist and at least 1 hour session per week with a speech pathologist for the summer months. The family recently moved to the city and there are no close relatives. The children are looked after by a neighbor who has two small children.

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UNIT 6

INFORMATION SHARING STRATEGIES

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UNIT 7

PARENT INVOLVEMENT GROUPS

There are many types of parent/teacher interaction. In the preceeding units the emphasis has been on information-sharing techniques using a one to one interaction. A strategy that is often referred to in the literature is working with parents in groups. Group work has the advantage of providing service to a number of people at the same time. This may be informational, educational or therapeutic in nature (Kroth, 1975).

Teachers seldom take on the responsibility for organizing and implementing skill training or therapeutic groups. The competencies needed to lead such groups usually require extensive training. Teachers, however, should know something about parent groups, how they are formed and for what purposes. They may choose to involve school counselors, or school psychologists as group leaders.

This unit discusses procedures that people go through in planning and implementing group work. It starts from the basic concern of determining the needs and strengths that parents may have, to the program designs that could be used.

Strengths and Needs of Parents

The importance of assessing strengths and needs of parents was discussed in an unpublished manuscript by Kirk and Krehbiel (1981). Some of their work is reproduced below.

All too often newsletters, topic workshops, or parent groups are begun on the basis of what a particular professional has to offer. Saul Alinsky (see Honig, 1980, p. 407) suggests that if you try to provide programs for people without giving them a say in what's happening, more often than not, they will suffer from your gift. This statement can also apply to direct involvement with parents and the importance of a needs and strengths assessment.

An instrument which measures individual needs can help the organizer in the following ways:

1. Assess the interests of a majority of parents.
2. Determine priorities.
3. Become aware of transient problems that may need immediate attention.
4. Identify the demographics of a potential audience.
5. Identify the amount and type of intervention to be offered.

In addition, the strengths assessment will help identify those skills and abilities of parents which will be useful in carrying out intervention strategies.

The purpose of the following discussion is to offer suggestions for possible assessment instruments that could be easily adapted to fit specific situations. Professionals should use this as a guide in development of their own instrument. Basic to any assessment, of course, is the

assumption that the professional believes in the value of parent involvement.

When assessing parental strengths and needs, it is helpful to have a few basic guidelines. The following represent basic steps which the authors have used in their work with parents.

1. Prepare a rough draft of a strength and needs assessment.
    - The prototype included in this unit can be modified to meet the needs of a specific program.
2. Solicit ideas for activities and topics from colleagues, parents and others interested in the education of children.
    - Don't include topics in a Strength and Needs Assessment for which you have no presenter. Parent hopes may be dashed when requested information is not available.
3. Distributed the Strength and Needs Assessment to families.
4. Collect the completed forms.
5. Compile the information.
    - One way of compiling the information is to tally the ratings of each topic on a blank form.
6. Arrange the topics in order of greatest interest and knowledge to least interest and knowledge.
7. Use the list of topics to plan the year's topical meetings and classes.

PARENT SUPPORT NETWORK PROJECT

STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT
FOR PARENTS OF DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED CITIZENS

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

AGE _____ PROGRAM/TEACHER _____

In order to plan parent programs, we need to know what kinds of topics are of interest to you. Would you please take a few minutes to let us know how important you consider each of the following areas and how much you already know about that area. If you are a two parent family, both parents are asked to fill out this form, just use two colors of ink. When you've completed this, please return it to _____

How much do you know about this? 1=not much 5=expert		Would you like to learn more about this? 1=no 5=definitely
1 2 3 4 5	(1) How infants/young people grow and develop...what's normal?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(2) Relationships between brothers, sisters and other children.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(3) How does language develop? Can I help?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(4) Setting limits, discipline & home responsibilities.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(5) What can I do to help my child's motor development?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(6) Is there anything that can be done to make feedings or mealtimes easier?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(7) Understanding "intelligence tests" and evaluation procedures.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(8) What can I do at home to help my son/daughter?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(9) What services are available in the community?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(10) How can I work more effectively with the professionals who serve my son/daughter?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(11) Parent-professional conferences; how can I get the most out of them?	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(12) Impact of a new child on the family.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(13) Ways of explaining handicaps to children, relatives and others.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(14) Medical, dental and nutritional needs of the disabled.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(15) Funding and legislation for the handicapped.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(16) Single parent and step parent issues.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(17) Effective parenting and communication.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(18) How children/adolescents change adult relationships.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(19) Drugs and alcohol.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(20) Human sexuality.	1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5	(21) How to work more effectively with the school system.	1 2 3 4 5

1	2	3	4	5	(22) Social relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	(23) Hearing from other parents with children who have similar disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	(24) Understanding more about my child's disability.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	(25) If we have another baby, what are our chances of having another child with a handicap?	1	2	3	4	5

I also know something about the following, and can help out by using these skills (e.g. music, carpentry, puppetry, etc.)_____

Do you have any other suggestions, ideas or concerns?_____

Thank you for taking the time to respond. Your suggestions will be used to plan future parent meetings.

- After determining how many parent classes or meetings the staff would probably schedule during the school year, the topics for each event can be chosen from those identified as important. In addition, parents who are able to serve as resources can be identified from the Strength and Needs Assessments.

8. Distribute the tentative schedule of parent activities to parents and co-workers.
9. Choose the evaluation methods to be used for each activity.
10. Modify activities when the needs and strengths of parents change.
    - For example, a lecture on how to stop "bedwetting" may not seem important to parents in September, but may be of great importance to families in February. The schedule needs to be flexible enough to allow scheduling changes when there is a shift in parental interests.

In summary, assessing parental strengths and needs is an important part of a comprehensive plan to provide services to parents and can be a rich source of information on resources of parents and the topics about which parents would like to have more information.

Theoretical Structures of Parent Involvement -- Groups

On an intervention level, Tavormina (1980) discussed three basic models of parent involvement. The first is parent counseling or reflective counseling where techniques such as those suggested by Auerback

(1968), Ginott (1957), and Gordon (1970) are taught to parents. Basically this model emphasizes feelings as a means of affecting a child's behavior.

The second model discussed by Tavormina is behavioral counseling which is geared toward teaching parents to manipulate their responses to a child in order to affect behavior. Examples of this technique are provided by Patterson (1971), O'Dell (1974), and Graziano (1977).

Tavormina suggests that because these two basic models have had a history of positive outcomes, a combination of the techniques is reasonable and has indeed been supported (Tavormina, et al., 1976; Abidin, 1975; Schopler & Reichler, 1973).

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Assignment 1 - Building A Theoretical Model of A "Good" Parent

Tavormina suggests that a model of "good" parenting needs to be built and validated because as it stands today there is no clear foundation upon which to justify intervention. He even goes so far as to say that, ". . . the long-term implications for grown children of previously counseled parents . . . are cast in doubt." The class should build a theoretical model of the "good" or "adequate" parent and then research one or two supporting articles for each aspect of the model. They should gather supporting literature from sociology, anthropology, and psychology. A publishable article should result.

Assignment 2 (Alternative) - Counseling Relevant to Other Theories

A child's age or severity of a handicap may require different models of intervention. The class should gather evidence that demonstrates the need for parent counseling to interface with developmental theories and theories relevant to severity of exceptional children.

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Choice of Technique

There are many "canned" programs on the market today which can be used on the parent/teacher intervention level. Familiarity with these programs will allow teachers more flexibility in either choosing a person to present at each group meeting or securing training themselves. The teacher should seldom strike out alone by reading the manual and proceeding without having personally been involved in one or more workshops. In some cases parent classes can be taught only by trained, certified instructors (e.g., Parent Effectiveness Training).

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Assignment 3 - Materials Review

Individuals in the class should secure the following materials, study the technique and briefly present each to the class. The class should prepare a checklist (sample follows) on each material.

Insert Fig. 12 Parent Education
Materials Quick Reference

Some of the materials which should be reviewed follows. This is by no means exhaustive and the class might wish to review Parenting in 1977: A Listing of Parenting Materials, 1977, PMIC Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East 7th, Austin, TX 78701.

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, 1976
(STEP)
Authors: Dinkmeyer & McKay
Source: American Guidance Service, Inc.
Circle Pines, MN 55014

Problem Solving Techniques in Childrearing, 1978
Authors: Shure & Spivack
Source: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
433 California St.
San Francisco, CA 94104

Fig. 12

PARENT EDUCATION MATERIALS QUICK REFERENCE

NAME:

AUTHORS:

SOURCE:

COST:

TRAINING NEEDED:

TARGET POPULATION:

A. Parents Family Sibling

Single Parents Foster Parents

Abuse Parents Extended Family

B. Handicapping Condition (if relevant)

1. Severity

C. Age of children

D. Socio-economic considerations

E. Behaviors: social, interpersonal, target

FORMAT: Group (large - small)

Time

Type of leader

Group leaders guide provided

APPROACH: 1. reflective behavioral combination

2. specific (e.g., at home skills)

Can material provide for:

1. Measurement of teacher perception of child as better adjusted.

2. Measurement of increased positive parental perception of children.

Figure 12 (continued)

3. Measurement of improvement in parental self-image

4. Assessment of increase/decrease in specific, targeted child behaviors (tying shoes, spitting)

5. Assessment of increase/decrease in broad areas of child behavior (e.g., adaptive skills, negative self concept)

6. Assessment of specific parenting skills (e.g., Wagonseller & McDowell, 1979 include a brief self evaluation)

Parent Readiness Education Project (PREP), 1977
Authors: Parent Readiness Education Project
Source: Diane Bert, Ph.D.
Project Director, PREP
Redford Union School District
18499 Beech Daly Road
Detroit, MI 48240

The Art of Parenting, 1977
Authors: Wagonseller, Burnett, Salzberg, Burnett
Source: Research Press
2612 N. Mattis Ave.
Champaign, IL 61820

Managing Behavior, 1978
Author: McDowell
Source: B. L. Winch & Associates
Torrence, CA

Positive Parenting, 1977
Authors: Rinn & Markle
Source: Research Media
96 Mount Auburn St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

Tuning Into Your Child: Awareness Training for Parents, 1976
Author: Rowen
Source: Humanics Press
881 Peachtree Street, NE
Atlanta, GA 30309

Parenting: A guide for young people, 1975
Authors: Gordon & Wallin
Source: Oxford Book Company
11 Park Place
New York, NY 10007

Steps to Independence: A Skills Training Series for Children With Special Needs, 1976
Authors: Baker, Brightman, Heifetz, Murphy
Source: Research Press
2612 N. Mattis Ave.
Champaign, IL 61820

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Thus far this unit has addressed the preventive/educative aspects of parent involvement with a discussion of major models generally in use.

These are groups that would meet in a workshop type of situation for so many continuous weeks or sessions. The following section deals with parent "education" groups on a less involved level. There are many short topics which would lend themselves to single sessions. Again, teachers might invite a guest speaker or handle the topic themselves. The following gives an example of how an assessment might be used and carried through at various mirror model levels.

FROM ASSESSMENT TO SESSION

In the following hypothetical example, two resource teachers have sent out the assessment instrument to 30 parents of elementary school age children. The return is 60%. The reasons 40% did not complete the assessment form might be:

1. The form never made it home.
2. If it did get home, some parents did not read it.
3. Too little time was allowed for return; i.e., some parents don't make it through their child's papers until Sunday evening.
4. The wording was too jumbled and parents didn't understand the instructions.
5. The form was too long.
6. Parents were not interested.
7. Parents do not like to make a decision or choice.
8. The child misplaced the completed form.

To increase the rate of return the next time, these teachers might spend some time explaining the instrument to the children and soliciting their support. Later they might interview a couple of the children to determine reasons for non-return.

Assessment form analysis. Results for the hypothetical example indicated that the following areas were most "needed" by the majority of parents:

1. Child development
2. Nutrition

3. Single parenting

4. Transition to midschool

5. Effective parenting.

The results also showed that two parents consider themselves "expert" in the area of nutrition.

The advisory committee decides the following steps will be taken to meet the identified needs:

1. Child development - A specific area, cognitive development, will be offered to the parents via one evening session. It will be offered early in the year so that if the parents desire any additional sessions after participating in the first this can be arranged.

2. Nutrition - Articles will appear in bimonthly newsletters relevant to nutrition. The two parents indicating "strengths" will be contacted for their help and resources. Some of the articles will be compiled by older children. The articles will be made available to the PTA/PTO for general distribution if desired.

3. Single parents - A special Saturday morning get-together will be offered to single parents. A guest speaker from a local mental health agency will be invited to address the topic of Survival Skills for the Single Parent. The teachers will solicit help from parents by asking for someone to volunteer their home and someone else (2 parent family) to provide babysitting services at no cost in their home. Notice of this meeting will be sent to all parents in the school.

4. *Transition to midschool* - Again the newsletter format will be used. Interviews with a few former students will provide hints as to areas of concern. Teachers and counselors in the new school will be asked for their input into solutions for various problems and questions. This section of the newsletter will include a suggestion that parents talk over the article with their 5th graders and record any questions not addressed by the article. Answers will appear in the next newsletter. Therefore, this newsletter should be completed with ample time to answer new questions.

5. Effective parenting - The teachers will arrange for a person skilled in either Parent Effectiveness Training or Behavior Management type of techniques to present a workshop. It will be made available to all paid members of the PTA.

More detailed information. The session for the first identified area, child development will be presented here in sequential steps.

Step 1 - Realistically these teachers expect that of the 60% return of the form, about 20% or 4 parents, will actually attend parent information/education sessions. The majority of these will be mothers. However, a letter will be sent to all parents 2 weeks early announcing the session. (It will be sent only to the parents of the resource rooms.) Notice of the session will be made in the general PTA/PTO bulletin.

Insert letter A about here (Fig. 13)

Insert notice A about here (Fig. 14)

A notice will be placed on the teacher's lounge bulletin board and in the office.

Insert Notice B about here (Fig. 15)

Step 2 - Arrange for a child development specialist to speak on cognitive aspects with special emphasis on delays. Ask about needed audio/visual equipment or other materials. Be sure to be specific about the time. Let the presentor know that the needs assessment was completed by parents of children in resource rooms, but that all parents have been invited. Ask if he/she will allow questions after the presentation.

Step 3 - One week before the meeting, send Letter B to resource room parents. Include either Letter B or Notice C in the PTA remin-

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Insert Letter B about here (Fig. 16)

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der. Place the letter on the teacher's lounge bulletin board and in

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Insert PTA Notice C about here (Fig. 17)

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each teacher's box with a handwritten note in red that they are very welcome to attend.

Step 4 - Send Letter B to the presentor. This lets him/her know you are working at getting a good attendance. Arrange for copying of materials, equipment, refreshments (if desired), and child care.

Step 5 - Two days before, call the presentor to be sure all arrangements are complete.

Call resource room parents just to remind them.

Remind the students.

Make a check list of all items needed and use it!

Insert Checklist about here (Fig. 18)

Step 6 - Review the check list on the morning of October 20 and make final arrangements.

Announce following the PTA meeting, the room where child care is provided. Ask parents to drop 50¢ in the jar.

Signal the presentor when 10 minutes remain.

Pass out the evaluation sheet (optional) and provide pencils.

Insert Evaluation Sample about here (Fig. 19)

At the end of the presentation allow 20 minutes or so for questioning.

Pay the sitter(s) all funds collected.

Step 7 - Write a formal thank you to the presentor, including positive feedback from parents if available.

Verbally thank the PTA for including the special notice.

Summarize the presentation in the next newsletter for parents who could not attend. Provide a reading list relevant to the presentation.

Thank the students.

Assess the evaluation form.

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Assignment 5 - Planning for Parent Information

The class should divide into 3 groups. Each group should: (1) write out all Steps (including letter, notices, evaluation, checklist) for each situation; (2) include a special section of ideas to increase attendance; and (3) include an example of newsletters if this is the format used and justify use of a newsletter.

Group 1 - Parents of elementary school children have indicated they would like to know more about effective parenting.

Group 2 - Parents of midschool exceptional children have indicated an interest in drugs and sexuality.

Group 3 - Parents of moderately delayed kindergarten children have indicated they would like to know more about intelligence tests and evaluation procedures. (This is not to include I.E.P.)

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Assignment 6 - Assessment of the Child

Unit 1 of this module suggested priority should be given to positive child benefits as a result of parent-teacher interaction. The class as a whole should discuss and list pre- and post-tests (formal or informal) and other assessment measures that each Group above could use to assess child benefits. Rationale and relevant literature (where available) should be included.

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The generation of topics is endless. Once the assessment indicates a general area of interest, then the teacher and/or advisory group must use imagination and ingenuity to create the topics.

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Fig. 13

LETTER A

Dear Parents:

Our thanks for returning the Strengths and Needs Assessment. The results of compiling all the returned forms indicate that the majority of you are interested in child development. We will arrange for a guest speaker (to be announced) to give a one hour presentation next month following the PTA meeting. As requested, we have decided to have an evening session so that both parents will be able to attend.

Please remember October 20 (Tuesday), 7:15 pm following a short PTA general meeting.

Thank you again for taking the time to complete the form. Information regarding more results will be in the next newsletter.

Sincerely,

Fig. 14

NOTICE

(To be attached to the next PTA general meeting announcement.)

Following the general meeting, there will be a one hour presentation on certain aspects of child development. All interested parents are invited. Please watch for more details.

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Fig. 15

NOTICE B

To All Teachers:

Following the next PTA meeting (October 20, Tuesday) a guest speaker will present on some cognitive aspects of child development. Please encourage your parents to attend. More details later.

Fig. 16

LETTER B

Dear Parents:

As promised we have asked Gail Beam to give a short presentation on child development, particularly How Children Think. She is a childhood specialist who has worked for the last 10 years as director of the child development center at State University.

Dr. Beam will present some very interesting information about thinking at different ages and why teachers and parents must wait for different stages. Here is an example:

> Ask two children which of two different size trees is older. One child says "the taller one". Another child answers she's not certain because she doesn't know when they were planted.

The first child is not wrong, but rather at a different level.

Date: October 20, (Tuesday)

(Following PTA general meeting.)

Child care will be provided for 50¢, also at the school providing you complete and return the form at the bottom of this letter.

We know you'll enjoy this presentation and will come away with a greater understanding of your child.

Sincerely,

I will need child care for my children ages _____.

Fig. 17

PTA NOTICE C

To be included on the PTA general meeting reminder:

Following the meeting, Gail Beam, Child Specialist at State University will present How Children Think. This very interesting session will provide information which can help you understand your child a little better. All parents are encouraged to attend. The session will last one hour.

Fig. 18

CHECKLIST

1. Call presentor/sitter
2. Call parents
3. Final arrangements for materials and equipment
4. Refreshments, utencils, plates/cups, napkins
5. Trash can
6. Extension cords
7. Evaluation sheets, pencils
8. Jar for sitter money, games, TV, snacks, napkins
9. Handouts
10. Tape recorder
11. Watch
12. Other

Fig. 19

EVALUATION SAMPLE

Did this presentation help you understand How Children Think at various ages?

1 2 3 4 5

no a great deal

Was the length of the presentation:

1 2 3 4 5

too long too short

Did the presentation cover what you expected?

1 2 3 4 5

no yes, definitely

Was the time OK (i.e., following PTA)?

1 2 3 4 5

no yes

Would you attend another session of this type?

1 2 3 4 5

no yes

Comments:

* * * * * * * * * * *

Assignment 7 - Creation of Topics

1. There is consistent scientific support that parents are crucial as language enlargers, enrichers and boosters for their children (Honig, 1980). Briefly outline a parent session that could teach parents to help their children advance in language skills. Utilize the expertise of local speech and language specialists.

2. Rudolf Dreikurs (1964) adapted Adlerian theory regarding child-rearing studies and advocates child study groups. Outline the content of such a study group utilizing and adapting Dreikurs approach.

3. Several parents have mentioned that they are lost when it comes to neurological jargon. Outline the content or a session or sessions that would deal with neurological or neuropsychological terminology.

* * * * * * * * * * *

There are several additional special topics considered important by the authors. Comments and exercises related to siblings, legal aspects, parent panels, and parent support groups follow.

Topic: Siblings

A recent reference by Patricia Aloot (1981) entitled "Siblings Are Exceptional People Too!" summarizes many of the issues relevant to siblings of handicapped children. Aloot suggests that professionals need a thorough understanding of family systems theory and how sibling relationships in any family represent a strong bond. The ambivalance (love and hate) of the sibling interaction often results in stressful and volatile situations. Yet throughout childhood, siblings help build each other's identity through interactions. What is the effect, then, when one child is different? When one child differs significantly in

culturally valued characteristics, the usual tendency is to think of the more adequate child as emotionally strong and secure and in need of little attention. This is certainly not always the case.

Marion (1981) contends that the negative feelings toward a handicapped sibling by non-handicapped children may significantly affect their own mental health. Aloot suggests that professionals should be aware of sibling role conflicts and coping strategies.

Aloot reviewed work by several investigators that contend the siblings of exceptional children have very specific needs (Grossman, 1972; Marion, 1981) which need to be addressed. In light of this, the following subsection is suggested to increase awareness of sibling attitudes and reactions to a handicapped child in the family.

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Assignment 8 - Sibling Panel

Arrange for several siblings with handicapped brothers or sisters to participate in a panel discussion. The children should be at least 10-12 years old. They should all have younger or all have older handicapped siblings of approximately the same severity and diagnostic label.

A. Request letters should be sent to potential panelists listing the areas (or even exact questions) for discussion. The areas should include how they were told of the sibling difference and what they were told; how well they understand the particular handicap; how they feel about the sibling; how they think their lives are affected currently and in the future. They should be asked not to discuss these areas with their parents.

B. Another alternative is to invite siblings to view a film and ask them to respond to certain preselected segments.

Once the panel has been arranged, only one person should ask the questions, and time limits should be set on responses. If no one in the group has extensive counseling skills it might be wise to make sure such a professional is invited. With permission of the young people a video-tape might be considered. The "panel" should be seated in comfortable chairs, not behind a table. Questions from the floor should come only after all the arranged questions are answered and care should be taken not to in any way suggest to these siblings that their answers or responses or feelings were inappropriate.

The young people should be allowed to ask their audience questions and the hour should be terminated with refreshments and socializing.

Teachers will find that providing a special time for siblings might open the door for more involvement with the parents. Children are very candid and open with their feelings. Seeing and listening to them in an open discussion panel (or similar experience) will be very valuable to the teacher who decides to do a yearly or biyearly session with siblings of exceptional children.

Topic: Legal Aspects

Public Law 94-142 hit the educational scene like a Minnesota blizzard or a Kansas tornado in the mid 1970's. Only New Mexico chose not to participate in the funding provided by the law by refusing to accept the monies that were allowed. All states, including New Mexico, became acutely aware of the need to keep parents well informed of the procedures outlined in the law.

While there are a number of provisions of the law that effect the whole educational program, the parts that effect teachers that most center around the issues of "least restrictive environment" and the total Individual Educational Plan (IEP) process. Testing and placement procedures usually are the concern of administrators.

Teachers should know that the IEP is supposed to be developed with the parents for the benefit of the child, and not a paper plan for the parents to sign. While the reality of the work world makes it expedient for teachers to do much of the preliminary work prior to the parent meetings, the plan is supposed to represent a program developed by parents (home) and teachers (school).

Teachers should know that the information that school has accumulated about the child should be presented to the parents in a manner that is understood by the parents. Also, the information should be presented in the language that represents the parents native language.

Major changes in the IEP should not be made without consultation between the parent and the teacher. The procedures surrounding the IEP are not many, nor are they complex. In general, the procedures represent good planning techniques.

The law does not use the word mainstreaming, yet this concept is often referred to by both parents and professionals. A "least restrictive" environment can be anywhere from an institutional setting to a regular classroom setting. It is intended that each child should have an appropriate education with the provisions available to him/her to make it. There have been a number of court cases about how far the school people should be expected to go in providing for the needs of handicapped children. Usually when teachers and parents have established good working relationships and

levels of trust, plans are made that are in the best interest of children.

Topic: Parent Panels

Parents of former students can be very valuable sources of information to both current parents of exceptional students as well as to parents of regular students. Often teachers find that a panel composed of 3 to 4 parents, or sets of parents, is a good way to draw a large crowd. Both the panel and the audience should be aware of the major questions to be addressed. For example, suppose a preschool teacher for developmentally delayed children arranges a panel of former parents in January before the current students will be leaving the preschool. Concerns to be considered might be:

1. Experience with the Evaluation, Appraisal and Review committee regarding special education placement
2. Experience with planning an Individual Education Plan
3. Bus schedules
4. Support groups
5. Aggressive vs. assertive parents
6. Conflicting test results
7. Administrative support
8. Where to really get answers
9. Selection of a program or teacher
10. Mainstreaming
11. Use of labels for exceptionalities
12. Retesting and re-evaluation

13. How children adjust

14. Ways to make it easier on children

15. The unexpected

16. The greatest happenings.

Only 5-6 of the above should be considered at one meeting unless time permits. The most efficient method to help assure good participation would be to solicit a "priority list" from current parents prior to inviting the panel. Tally the priorities, be certain to invite former parents who've experienced the concerns, and send out a list of final topics.

Teachers should either monitor the panel themselves or invite a monitor that will assure balanced time for comments between panel members. A time limit should be placed on responses and concern areas. Teachers should practice active listening and jot down notes that indicate a follow-up might be necessary for some parents.

Topic: Support Groups

Often teachers find themselves in the midst of parents who need more than education. They need counseling on a more direct level, either through a group or individually. This is generally passed on to the school counselor or psychologist. However, parent support groups might be originated by a teacher who "drops out" after the first or second meeting except as a resource. A way to do this might be to suggest to each parent the strengths they have to offer other parents and set up a convenient meeting.

Support groups for parents of very young children are important. The following review by Martin (1975) regarding the role parents play in potential developmental problems, is relevant:

-Parents who provide low levels of auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthe tic stimulation and who do not make this stimulation they provide contingent on the infant's responses contribute in significant ways to the less than optimal development of the child's general intellectual and social competencies.

-Parents who are overly restrictive and who also direct hostility toward the child encourage the development of adult-directed emotional dependency.

-Parents who do not provide young children with consistent external rewards for appropriate self-control behaviors, who fail to model self-control behaviors themselves, and who fail to provide the young child with meaningful cognitive structuring (mediated cognitions) of the applications of rewards and punishments contribute to developing lowered levels of internalization of self-control strategies in their children.

-Parents who fail to demand age-appropriate behavior, to enforce rules firmly and consistently, and to encourage responsive communication with their children contribute to the development of lowered levels of independence and autonomy in their children.

-Parental punitiveness and nonacceptance of their children is consistently positively related to displays of aggressiveness in children's behavior. Parental nonacceptance is also generally related to

the presence of withdrawn, neurotic behaviors and psychosomatic disorders in children.

(This list taken from: Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 1981, 1, vii-ix.)

Martin's findings should add emphasis to the need for early involvement of parents with infants, whether their children are handicapped or not. Ways to involve parents at the preschool and earlier level takes special planning and consideration.

UNIT 7

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UNIT 7

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Historically, prior to current laws, parents of handicapped children were expected to be passive and grateful for the services given to their children. In the late 60's and early 70's parent and advocate groups formed because of the increasing awareness that handicapped children were not being adequately served.

Specific state litigation (PARC vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971; Mills vs. Board of Education, 1972) led the way to Federal Law P.L. 94-142, the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (1975). P.L. 94-142 established the parents right to be actively involved in the education of their child. It is also mandated that parents have the right to due process prior to labeling and placement of their child.

This article goes on to describe the roles and the responsibilities of parents and school officials in the areas of: decision-making team; the IEP; annual goals and objectives; special anciallary services for the child; the least restrictive environment; and the parents and child's accessibility to school records.

This article emphasizes the urgency for both parents and school officials to establish a mutually cooperative relationship in order to best serve the handicapped child.

Farber, B.J., William, D., & Fargo, R. Family crisis and the decision to institutionalize the retarded child. CEC Research Monograph, Institute for Research on Exceptional Children, 1960 (Series A, No. 1).

Purpose: This article investigates the nature of family crisis in a family with a mentally retarded child. It looks at the willingness or unwillingness of parents to place their child in an institution.

Method: Two hundred and sixty-eight families in the Chicago metropolitan area, who had a retarded child living at home and whose parents were either on the mailing lists of an association for parents of mentally retarded children or the waiting list for admission to Lincoln or Dixon State Schools in Illinois, were selected for the sample.

The husband and wife of each family were interviewed separately. The interviews were oral and written and lasted about two hours. The instruments were measures of family integration and scales relating to social psychological variables.

Results: Nature of family crisis:

-In families with high early marital integration, the extent of the initial impact of the retardation diagnosis was inversely related to the current degree of marital integration.

-Although retarded boys had a greater initial impact on fathers, they had a greater current impact on mothers.

-Mothers were more willing to place a retarded boy who was the oldest child than a retarded boy who was an only child.

-In fathers, current impact tended to vary directly with initial impact.

-A diagnosis of retardation suggests a bereavement similar to death in the family. Personal impact may be greatest in those families whose members had been close and highly interdependent prior to diagnosis. The impact is even greater when there is an emphasis by the parent upon achievement.

-The mother was found to be the social-emotional leader in the family life and the extent of involvement with the retarded child was set at her level of involvement.

Willingness to institutionalize the retarded child:

-The higher the social status, the greater was the relative willingness of the father as compared with the wife to institutionalize the retarded child.

-In high status families only, the parents' willingness to place the child in an institution varied directly with the number of normal children in the family.

-The lower the social status, the greater was the relative willingness of mothers of retarded boys as compared with mothers of retarded girls to institutionalize the child.

-A retarded boy placed a more severe stress on family relations than a retarded girl and, therefore, both parents had a greater willingness to place a retarded boy.

The results of the present study have reaffirmed previous work by Farber on the subject of the impact of a mentally retarded child on integration of the family.

The "No-lose" Method for resolving conflicts. In Gordon, T., Parent effectiveness training. New York: Plume Books, 1975.

This is P.E.T.'s third method for resolving conflicts. It exists when a conflict arises between two individuals who possess equal or relatively equal power. It is a no-power method or a "no-lose" method. Conflicts are resolved with no one winning and no one losing. It is conflict resolution by mutual agreement. This method is effective for several reasons:

1. The child is motivated to carry out the solution because he has participation in the resolution of the problem. Participation increases cooperation.

2. When parent and child participate, the solution is usually more creative than if just one of them thought of it.

3. This method develops a child's thinking skills.

4. It drastically reduces hostility on the part of both parent and child.

5. It requires less need for enforcement by parents.

6. This method eliminates the need for a power struggle. The parent respects the child's viewpoint and the child respects the parent's viewpoint.

7. It encourages the problem-solving process in children.

8. This method communicates to the child that both his needs and their parents needs are important.

9. It becomes a therapeutic technique for the child.

Marion, R. Minority parent involvement in the IEP process: A systematic model approach. Focus on Exceptional Children, 1979, 10 (8), 1-15.

The historical development of minority parent involvement is traced through schools in general, and special education in particular. A profile of Black and Mexican American family structure is drawn. From these two sources of information, a minority parent participation model was developed. This model consists of 10 steps with implementation guidelines for each step.

The steps are as follows:

1. Contact parents through verbal or written communication.

2. Refer the child to the Local Support Team who discuss possible special education placement. Parents need to be informed of this situation.

3. & 4. Schedule education meeting and invite the parents. Parents need to be prepared for the meeting so that they can act and participate in the fullest way.

5. Conduct the educational meeting.

6. Summarize the meeting results and recommendations verbally and in writing.

7. Carry out recommendations - parents must be actively involved in any action taken.

8. Meet with parents to review the results of the recommendations.

9. Refer the child's case to admission, review and dismissal committee. Parents become actively involved in the development of the IEP.

10. Implement the IEP in the special education setting. Parents are kept informed and updated by verbal and written communication.

This minority parent participation model is a systematic approach to enabling parents and school personnel to work in an optimum participation environment.

Rethinking a good idea: a reassessment of parent involvement

Martha Foster, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia

Michael Berger, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia

Mary McLean, Ph.D.
Staff Member
Family Intervention Project
Georgia State University
Atlanta, Georgia

GOOD IDEAS SHOULD be commended, and if they work they should be adopted. Even exceptional ideas, however, should be reviewed periodically to see whether the premises under which they were adopted still hold and their influence is still positive. Parent involvement is a good idea that has become an essential and often unquestioned component of intervention programs for young handicapped children.

Over the past 10 years the number of programs serving preschool-aged handicapped children has increased greatly. This is primarily a result of governmental support for program development in this area as exemplified by the First Chance projects funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, monies mandated through PL 94-142, and Project Head Start's inclusion of handicapped children in its programs. Parent involvement has been a mandated component of many such programs. Moreover, as new programs are developed, they look to already established projects for guidance concerning program goals and methods. Since the prevalent models of parent involvement tend to be

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adopted by newer programs, current conceptions of parent involvement are likely to have enormous impact on the structure of future programs for young handicapped children.

The value of adopting a new theoretical framework for parent involvement—a family systems perspective—although it would entail a paradigmatic shift from current conceptions, will be argued.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT PRACTICES

Current parent involvement practices are the legacy of several innovative developments of the 1960s. One such development was the use of nonprofessionals for the provision of therapeutic or educational services. For example, Guerney (1964; Guerney, Stoner, & Andronico, 1967), using a psychodynamic model, demonstrated the efficacy of using parents as therapists for their own children. More influentially, a number of behavior therapists (e.g., Patterson & Brodsky, 1966; Wahler, Winkel, Peterson, & Morrison, 1965) reported on the successful modification of deviant child behaviors where parents were the primary change agents.

Although such reports may not seem innovative today, at the time the systematic involvement of parents in child treatment represented a marked departure from the usual practice of working with individual children in isolation from their parents. The publication of two books on the use of nonprofessionals as change agents (Guerney, 1969; Tharp & Wetzel, 1969) solidified the concept of parents as resources for service delivery to children and provided professionals with techniques for using this new resource. These ideas, applied to programs for young handicapped children, resulted in parent-mediated educational or therapeutic interventions with children in homes, classrooms, and other settings.

Other major influences on parent involvement practices were compensatory programs for economically disadvantaged children, the most visible being the national Project Head Start (Zigler & Valentine, 1979). Drawing from the findings of the controlled experimental projects that served as the prototypes for Head Start (e.g., Gray & Klaus, 1965), parent involvement was adopted as a major program component of the first Head Start projects funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

As Valentine and Stark (1979) noted, there were two differing perspectives of what parent involvement in Head Start should mean. One view was rooted in a cultural deficit model that traced the academic and cognitive deficiencies of low-income children to inadequacies in their physical and social environments—that is, their families. Within this model the focus of parent involvement was on working with parents to ameliorate presumed deficiencies in mother–child interaction and in parents' knowledge and skills. Intervention strategies derived from this view include group learning activities for parents, educationally oriented home visits, and parent observation in the classroom.

The second rationale for parent involvement grew out of the sociological reasoning that differences in achievement and social success are rooted in a lack of opportunity for the members of certain classes within society. Unequal access to resources and an unequal voice in decision making was the basis, in this view, for lowered expectations and underdeveloped skills, which caused the differences observed among the poor as compared with more advantaged classes. This view focused on empowering parents, supporting their rights, encouraging their input into administrative decisions, and helping them serve as legislative and political advocates for themselves and their children. Aspects of both of the above views can be seen today in the parent involve-

ment activities characteristic of early intervention programs.

CHANGES IN THE POPULATION SERVED BY EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The population served by many early intervention programs for handicapped children today, however, differs from the population served by the model compensatory programs. An increasing number of early intervention programs serve large numbers of severely handicapped, often multihandicapped, children. This is quite different from the mildly handicapped, essentially disadvantaged children served by the compensatory education projects and by many of the early First Chance projects, including some programs that later served as model projects; for example, the High/Scope Project (Weikert, Deloria, Lawser, & Weigerink, 1970), Precise Early Education of Children with Handicaps (Karnes, Teska, Hodgins, & Badger, 1970), and the Milwaukee Project (Heber & Garber, 1975).

Many of the children now served in early intervention programs come from middle- or upper-income families. Neither of the two perspectives guiding parent involvement in the compensatory education programs seems especially relevant to programs serving children from these families. Models of parent involvement predicated on a cultural deficit hypothesis are not easily applied to these families, whose interaction patterns were the very standard against which low-income family styles were compared and found wanting. The approach to parent involvement that focuses on helping parents become informed consumers also may be irrelevant to parents in more advantaged families, who are hardly disenfranchised and are often very competent consumers of services for their handicapped children (Gorham, Des Jardins, Page, Pettis, & Scheiber, 1975; Schwartz, 1970).

The approach to parent involvement that focuses on helping parents become informed consumers may be irrelevant to parents in more advantaged families.

To the degree—and it is a significant degree—that the children and families now being served by early intervention programs differ from the populations from which the current models of parent involvement derive, these models should no longer be applicable.

CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY

Detailed examination of current patterns of parent involvement in early intervention efforts would lead to the conclusion that such programs typically assume that mothers are the primary caretakers for their children, that caring for children is the major or sole employment of most mothers, that children are raised by their two biological parents, and that fathers show their concern for their children through participation in organizational efforts such as fund-raising, meeting with legislators, and so forth. These assumptions are not based on data.

There is considerable demographic evidence of a great increase in variation among family types (Glick & Norton, 1977, 1979; Rawlings, 1978). Major factors contributing to the increase in variation among family types are the increased prevalence of divorce and remarriage, the huge increase in the percentage of mothers employed outside the home, and changes in commonly held definitions of appropriate gender behavior. The conventional nuclear family with father employed and mother at home is no longer the predominant family unit.

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Current estimates suggest that if the divorce rate were to stabilize in the future at its current rate, approximately 40% of all people now marrying would end their marriages in divorce (Glick & Norton, 1977). The increase in the divorce rate, plus a growing community acceptance for single parenting, has resulted in an increasing number of single-parent families—nine out of ten of which are headed by the mother—and a massive increase in the number of young children living in single-parent homes.

Another major social change is the increase in the number of mothers employed outside the home. Currently, 48% of all married women with children under 18 are employed in the labor force (Rawlings, 1978). As expected, the rate of maternal employment varies with the ages of children. For example, 55% of married women with children between the ages of 6 and 17 are working, whereas 40% of married women with children under 6 years old are employed. This latter figure also holds true for married women with children under 3 years of age (Rawlings, 1978). Although these figures represent substantial changes in employment patterns over previous nonwartime eras, the current employment rate for single-parent mothers with young children is even higher.

Another phenomenon affecting family life today is the change in men's and women's roles. Both male and female roles are expanding, moving from delimited roles strongly differentiated from one another to more interchangeable roles, particularly when family size is small (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976). One relevant example of role change is the increase in the number of men involved in the childbirth process and in child-rearing activities. Although such involvement is more characteristic of men from particular subgroups of families, it has had enough impact to alter institutional policies such as hospital rules and work leave policies (e.g., obtaining paternity leave).

Thus the traditional assumptions about family structure that have guided parent involvement efforts need to be revised to take into account the increase in viable family types and changing gender roles.

ROLE CONFLICT BETWEEN PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

In addition to considering changes within the family unit, it is important to address what goes on at the interface between the family and service delivery systems. The role of a professional working with a young handicapped child is not the same as the role of a parent of a young handicapped child. Professionals are paid to devote their efforts almost solely to the welfare of the young child with whom they work. Parents must pay attention to the needs of their handicapped child, their own needs, and the needs of other family members (L'Abate, 1976; Minuchin, 1974).

This difference in roles often leads to conflict. For example, from the perspective of the professional, more services for the child or more effort expended on the child is better. For the parent, more services provided to the child may be better for the child, and for other family members as well, for example, when the family of a newly diagnosed handicapped child receives help in understanding and managing the child's condition. On the other hand, the provision of more services to the child may harm other family members, as when a parent devotes so much time to the handicapped child that he or she becomes exhausted or depressed, and the needs of other family members are neglected. Indeed, at times the provision of more services to the child may even be harmful to the child, such as when an overly intense mother–child dyad is encouraged toward even more extensive

involvement in the guise of parent-mediated intervention.

Parents come to programs with the expectation of getting help for their child. When the assistance carries with it high explicit or implicit expectations of parent participation, and particularly when services for the child are embedded within a program model predicated on time-consuming commitments by parents (as in many home-based programs), to not participate fully may cause parents to feel less than fully helpful to their child. The dilemma for many parents is a very real one. If the early childhood program is the only resource available, the choice may be either to participate or to not receive services. If parents do not participate fully, either because of family demands or a lack of interest in the programs offered, they risk either guilt or critical comment. The model, after all, assumes that parents will want what is best for the child; if they do not like what the model offers, the implication may be that they do not have the child's best interests at heart.

Another conflict may develop between parents and professionals as professionals assume the role of trainer and require parents to become trainees. Professionals can no longer assume that parents are unsophisticated about psychological and educational processes. Indeed, owing to the massive increase in research with young children that began in the early 1960s, followed by widespread governmental endorsement of the importance of the early years through the funding of programs such as Head Start, there has been an explosion of information regarding child development, which is now easily available to parents. This knowledge explosion can be seen in the wealth of books, articles, educational toys, and parenting classes that focus on enhancing parents' understanding of the needs and potentials of infants and young children.

Thus professionals need to investigate the possibility that parents may already have many of the skills they had intended to teach them. For example, when professionals instruct parents on how to teach—how to explain the task, reinforce the child, structure the situation—without first ascertaining the parents' teaching abilities, they may convey the message that the parent is incompetent as an educator.

THE NEED FOR NEW THEORY

Changes in family structure and composition, the diversity in social class, the degree of disability served by intervention programs, and the wider availability of information about child development and parenting point to the need for revision in the content and types of parent involvement activities offered by early childhood programs. Individual programs clearly must continue to tailor activities to the particular needs of the families served, for example, by programming with the social networks of single parents (Berger & Fowlkes, 1980) or operating programs on evenings or weekends so that working parents of both genders can participate. Such programmatic modifications, although important, are, however, insufficient. At a more fundamental level the conceptual or theoretical basis for parent involvement warrants reexamination.

Parent services as they are currently practiced focus either on individuals or on dyads. The two most commonly used approaches to working with parents, parent counseling and parent-mediated behavior modification, are good examples. Typically, the parent counseling approach focuses on resolving grief and other emotions thought to be associated with having a handicapped child (Berger & Foster, 1976). The problem is viewed as intrapsychic, within the thinking and feeling of the individ-

ual parent. Intervention within this approach is directed at altering the intrapsychic reality of the parent; it is intervention at the individual level.

By contrast, parent-mediated behavior modification, or parent training, generally focuses on more pragmatic problems of child rearing such as teaching the child specific skills or managing particular child behaviors. This approach is usually dyadic, with interventions aimed at restructuring interactions between family members, typically mothers and children. Although many behavior therapists (e.g., Alexander & Barton, 1980; Wahler, 1980) have in recent years moved toward a position similar to the one now being espoused and conceptualized family interaction in units larger than the dyad, their thinking is not yet common practice in early intervention programs.

Mother–child pairs do not exist in a vacuum; what goes on in this dyad influences and is influenced by the behavior of other family members. It is common in early intervention programs to find that many mothers will not carry out parent-training procedures or, more interestingly, will carry them out in the educational setting but not at home. Such behavior is often labeled as resistance by professionals. Such behavior occurs and is often misunderstood by professionals, because interventions with parents typically emanate from conceptual orientations that cannot handle the complex relationships and organizational structures characteristic of family networks (Foster & Berger, 1979).

Individual and dyadic theories conceptualize human behavior in units of one or two very well. But families are not units of one or two; they are interconnected, complex systems in which interactions are often triadic or "multiadic" (e.g., Minuchin, Rosman, & Baker, 1978; Parke, 1979). Not only do families typically interact in units larger than two, but these interactions are patterned by an organizational structure that contains particular roles and must accomplish particular tasks if the needs of individual family members and the family as a whole are to be satisfied. The developmental sequences of families increase the complexity of family life; the roles and tasks of the family must change as family members mature (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980). Until recently, however, conceptual systems that adequately described the multiple interactive relationships within the family were lacking.

Individual and dyadic theories conceptualize human behavior in units of one or two very well. But families are not units of one or two.

AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Family systems theory—particularly the structural view of Minuchin and his colleagues (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin et al., 1978) and the strategic approach of Haley (1973, 1976, 1980)—offers a useful conceptual framework for professionals working with families with a handicapped individual. In our own efforts with preschool-aged handicapped children (Berger & Fowlkes, 1980; Foster & Berger, 1979) we have been guided by family systems theory in understanding families and working with them.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed presentation of the theory; the works of Minuchin and Haley cited above articulate the family systems theory clearly and extensively.

Both the structural and strategic approaches to family systems share a belief that behavior (including internal behavior) is affected by context, that symptoms or other problem

behaviors can best be understood as part of interactional sequences between people, and that these sequences are embodiments of organizational dysfunctions within particular systems such as the family. These approaches are also useful as a way of mapping and describing family structure in families without clinical problems so that potential dysfunction can be prevented.

The structural approach to families particularly examines how subsystems (marital, parental, and sibling) and individuals in the family are organized in relation to one another. Every family has a structure: the pattern of alliances, roles, and functions used to make decisions and carry out family tasks. In well-functioning families the boundaries around subsystems and between generations are clear. For example, marital issues are settled between spouses without involving the child, or a parenting decision made by one spouse is supported by the other. In addition, there is a clear hierarchy with parents in charge and with children having privileges and responsibilities according to their development level. In more dysfunctional families, the hierarchy is often unclear or reversed, or there are coalitions across generations or other boundary violations. Another important concept, which locates the family in time, is the family life cycle (Haley, 1973), the sequence of developmental stages from courtship through child rearing through retirement, each of which poses unique issues for the family and demands a particular organizational structure.

THE APPLICATION OF SYSTEMS THEORY IN EARLY INTERVENTION

Family structure

What is the value of the systems framework for practitioners in early childhood programs? Several key concepts mentioned above have particular utility for enhancing staff understanding of families and the ways program activities affect them. One important concept is that problems are relational, and therefore the most useful unit of analysis is larger than one. Within a systems framework behavior can best be understood by examining sequences among two or more persons interacting interdependently (Haley, 1976). This leads, for example, to looking beyond the mother–child dyad when professionals intervene. Because of the interrelatedness of family members, an intervention with a child or a parent is an intervention into the entire family system (Montalvo & Haley, 1973).

Professionals, therefore, must think about interventions from within a framework that takes into account effects beyond the individual or the dyad. For example, to teach a mother a new set of behavior management skills to use with her child may have a salutary effect on the mother–child dyad unless this approach is undercut by a father who responds to the shift in power between himself and his wife by intensifying his support for the "old ways" of dealing with the child's behavior. The result may be conflict between the parents and an untenable choice for the child. In such a situation, intervening with the mother alone is risky unless one is cognizant of the particular balance of power operating within this family's "executive subsystem."

Family hierarchy

Hierarchy is another useful concept. Families, like other living systems, are organized hierarchically. In families, hierarchies are age graded, with greater power and responsibility resting with parents. (For a discussion of predictable hierarchical dysfunctions in families, see Foster & Berger, 1979.) When working with a family, it is crucial to gain the support of the persons who hold the highest positions in the hierarchy, because when a

family's hierarchy is violated by a program, the family often successfully resists the program. Hence, programs that contact fathers directly for their input or that acknowledge the significant role of a grandparent are being sophisticated about an important dimension of family organization.

Attention to the notion of hierarchy requires professionals to consider how they interface with and affect the family's structure. Professionals must decide where they enter into the family hierarchy. Because of actual or presumed expertise, the professional is always at risk for overriding and displacing the parents' position as authorities in the family (Haley, 1980), particularly when the parents' confidence may be shaken by the difficulties of rearing a handicapped child. Over the long run, when the professional overrides the family hierarchy, goals with the child will not be achieved, parents will successfully resist staff efforts, and staff will alternate between feelings of wanting to protect the child from the incompetent parents and hoping that the family will move out of their service area.

A classic example of a sequence that might lead to such outcomes is the following:

1. A staff member works directly and intensively with a difficult child, implying that the parents are incompetent to handle the child and that the expert must take over.
2. The parents withdraw, feeling they have been failures, or the experts would not have needed to take over.
3. The staff member runs into difficulty with the child, but realizing that he or she cannot adopt the child, indicates to the parents that they should do more for the child and care for him or her properly.
4. The parents begin to involve themselves more with the child.
5. The staff member says the parents are dealing with the child incorrectly and begins to work again with the child.
6. The parents withdraw, letting the staff member take care of the child's problems.
7. Etc. (Haley, 1976)

This example is not meant to imply that all interventions should be done by parents but that staff should support parents' position in the family hierarchy and not displace them. For example, it is perfectly reasonable in a classroom-based program for the teacher to be in charge of working with the child. That is the teacher's area of expertise. But when a teacher works with parents, it should be as an equal-status collaborator, with the teacher taking charge of programming for the child in the classroom and the parents taking charge of programming at home. In general, a key to not displacing parents in the family hierarchy is to give parents the credit for all desirable changes in the child (Haley, 1976; Minuchin, 1974).

Family life cycle

A third important construct from family systems theory is the family life cycle. Life-cycle transitions, such as the birth of the first child or a child leaving home, represent nodal points for families that are likely to be stressful, because they entail considerable reorganization of roles and tasks (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980). Systems theorists (e.g., Haley, 1980) have repeatedly noted the occurrence of symptoms in individual family members when the family is experiencing a life-cycle transition. Programs can be sensitive to life-cycle issues by gearing program activities and interventions to assist families in reorganizing for the next life-cycle transition. An example of how an early childhood program might address a life-cycle issue is illustrated in the following vignette.

The family consists of two parents, an 18-

year-old child, a 14-year-old child, and a 4-year-old child who is severely retarded. The oldest child has been very involved in the care of the handicapped child, as well as mitigating a very close relationship between the mother and the 4 year old. The father works long hours, and though the marriage appears stable, the parents have been somewhat distant from one another, with the mother closer to the children than to the father. A shift is occurring in that the oldest child is preparing to marry and thus leave home.

When the 18 year old moves out, the mother shifts her focus more to the youngest child, who becomes a major source of emotional contact for her and a justification that she is still needed as a parent (the 14 year old is well into adolescent separation). Structurally, boundaries between the mother and the 4 year old are weak (they are overly close), with distance between the mother and the father and between the father and the 4 year old.

To encourage more contact between the mother and the child through intense mother–child activities would make an already atypical structure more rigid. If the mother and child become even closer, it becomes less likely that the mother would be able to separate from the child when developmentally appropriate to do so; thus the child's independence is inhibited. Instead, parent activities (e.g., social) that serve to bring the parents together provide other sources of emotional satisfaction for the mother, and distance between the child and mother would be indicated to rebalance this family system as it negotiates a life-cycle transition. Failure to rebalance the system is likely to result in the 18 year old being pulled back into the family orbit.

In summary, systems theory requires attending to structure, hierarchy, and life-cycle differences among families when assessing needs and planning interventions. Systems theory therefore permits a more individualized approach to dealing with families, because it provides a set of concepts and techniques for understanding families and offers logical directions for intervention. The adoption of a family systems framework does not rule out any of the already widely used methods of parent involvement. It simply provides a wider lens and a set of decision rules that suggest what the effects of intervening with one family member or one subsystem are likely to be on the rest of the family system.

A systems framework provides a means for anticipating both direct and indirect effects of interventions with families. It thus seems to be a useful direction to pursue to narrow the gap between the complexity of our understanding of individual child development and the relative simplicity of our current understanding of family functioning and development.

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The time has come to stop thinking of parent involvement as implying a specific set of activities (e.g., parent groups, observations, meetings, or political action). Rather, a concern for parent involvement is best shown through a point of view that continually takes into account the needs and skills of the entire family. Such a point of view does not rule out any of the current types of parent services (each of which is appropriate for many families) but rather requires that services be selected on the basis of a comprehensive understanding of a family's unique situation. Professionals need to learn to think as well about family development as they do about child development.

To think well about their work with families, professionals need to adopt a more

The time has come to stop thinking of parent involvement as implying a specific set of activities.

comprehensive theory of family functioning. Family systems theory offers a sophisticated approach for understanding the complex set of interrelationships that families present. The adoption of family systems theory, however, may create a significant problem for professionals, because the theory by definition implies a shift to a unit larger than the individual. Most service networks involved with handicapped children, such as the educational and medical systems, still define the individual child as the target of intervention. To the extent that service systems define an individual as the focus of the problem, and therefore the target of intervention, conceptualizing problems in terms of the relationships among family members (or between families and service systems) will lead to practical difficulties.

Professionals who think systematically are continually restricted by the organizational structures that constitute our current service delivery systems and the conceptual systems underlying these structures. These difficulties are perhaps most clearly seen in programs for emotionally disturbed children, where the problem is in the interactions between the child and his or her environment (family and school), but our service structures demand that the child be treated in isolation from this environment (Hobbs, 1966).

While seeking a new conceptual framework from which to generate parent involvement activities, professionals should be forewarned that should the family systems way of thinking be adopted, the very concept of parent involvement will become obsolete. The idea of parent involvement implies that the needs of children and of parents are truly separate and that professionals must do something to get parents properly involved with their children. To the extent that the needs of families are understood systematically and that all family members are seen in context, the boundaries between services for children and services for families will become less distinct. Although this is a radical shift, it offers the future opportunity of helping families in ways that both support their competence and better meet their needs.

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FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

PARENT TRAINING AND COUNSELING

FACILITATING EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS BY IMPROVING PARENT CONFERENCES

Roger Kroth[1]

Parents have been recognized as viable forces in the educational development of their children, but often the acknowledgment of their influence has been negative. Parents have been used as convenient scapegoats for the lack of success, rather than as facilitators for successful accomplishment, on the part of their children. Parents have not been able to escape the heredity vs. environment issue that is prominent in psychological literature. They are vilified or deified by proponents of either side of the issue depending upon the performance of their children.

In a success-oriented society such as the North American community, the excitement accompanying the birth of a child quickly can turn to dismay if the child is born handicapped. As Wolfensberger and Kurtz (1969) point out.

> The rearing of children is one of the most significant and demanding tasks most of us confront in our lifetime. Yet, paradoxically, this is a task for which the average citizen has received little or no formal preparation. Even when the child has an unimpaired growth potential, and even where parents are highly intelligent, well-educated, and possessed of abundant material resources, child rearing is typically fraught with error, and frequently marked by failure. How much more problematic the situation becomes when the child is handicapped! (pp. 517-518)

The parental reactions of mourning, denial, guilt, rejection, shame, and frustration as discussed by various authors (Buscaglia, 1971; Love, 1970; Ross, 1964) are neither unexpected nor surprising. The gap between the real situation and the ideal that was expected is frequently so large that initial efforts to cope with the handicapping situation necessitate outside help. Yet, where to turn for assistance can be perplexing. The family doctor, a minister, a psychologist, a psychiatrist and a social worker represent some of the helping professionals that parents initially may come in contact with upon the discovery that their child is exceptional. As the child becomes older, other professionals may become involved in providing guidance for parents such as physical therapists, nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists, audiologists, and school personnel, depending upon the nature of the handicap. It is conceivable that parents may be involved with a number of professional aides at the same period of time, all recommending various treatment procedures. In some cases the parents are faced with essentially no service when they reside far from large communities, while in other instances they may be overwhelmed by a panorama of services.

1. Dr. Kroth is an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

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It is not the purpose of this paper to focus on the services or programs provided for parents by the various service personnel listed above, but rather to focus on programs for parents more clearly related to the educational environment.

Basically, there are two types of conferences that involve teachers and parents—information-sharing conferences, and problem-solving conferences. These are differentiated more by the stated purpose for the conference than by the actual content. In other words, the teacher and parents who come together to share information may find that a problem exists which can best be resolved by mutual action. On the other hand, a conference may be called by either the parents or teacher in which the successful resolution of a problem involves a program of information sharing. In either case the success or failure of the conference rests largely with the teacher, her preparation for the conferences and her techniques for problem solving.

It would be desirable if all teachers had the personal characteristics of "accurate empathy, nonpossessive warmth and therapeutic genuineness" which Truax and Wargo (1966) associate with successful psychotherapists. While one recognizes these traits in a teacher and appreciates them, the behavioral components which compose the traits may be difficult to teach. On the other hand, there are organizational procedures, techniques and basic principles that teachers can follow which will enhance the parent-teacher relationship and facilitate both types of conferences.

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Executive and Editorial Offices
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INFORMATION-SHARING CONFERENCES

Under the general category of information-sharing conferences are the parent-teacher contacts that include an intake conference, an initial conference and group meetings. The rapport that is established in these contacts sets the stage for the quality of further interactions.

Beginning teachers often feel a great deal of uneasiness about parent conferences. "What if the parent questions what I'm doing for her child?" "What do I do with a crying parent, an angry parent, or one that is resentful of having to attend the session?" Parents, on the other hand, often come to the conferences with similar feelings. They recognize that the teacher holds in her hands strong consequences which can be used for or against the child. Because the teacher is professional, she should be the one to set the tone for the conference, structuring the context and placing the parent at ease.

Intake and Initial Conferences

The intake conference and the initial conference may be the same in many instances. In some school districts, the special education teacher has not been included in the intake conference. Her first contact is with the child when he appears in her classroom. This is unfortunate. When the decision is made for the child to be admitted to a special education program, both parents and teacher would be able to benefit from face-to-face contact. The teacher would be able to see the parents' concern and hear the condition of placement. The parents would be able to visit with the teacher and learn something of the educational objectives for the class.

Duncan and Fitzgerald (1969) investigated the effects of establishing a parent-counselor relationship prior to the child's entrance into junior high school and looked at such variables as (1) average daily attendance, (2) schedule changes, (3) dropouts, (4) disciplinary referrals, (5) grade point average, (6) overt parental interest and (7) communication between parent and child. Duncan and Fitzgerald found that the early contact group showed significantly greater parental contact with the school, better attendance, higher grade point average, lower dropout rate, and fewer disciplinary referrals than the group who did not have conferences prior to school.

If the teacher is making the initial contact, it is important for her to have in mind an outline of the kind of information she would like to have to help her work with the child and his parents (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Initial Interview Guide: Getting a Picture of the Child

A. Present Status
1. Age
2. Sex
3. Grade; class; last year's teacher's name

B. Physical appearance and history
1. General impression made by child
2. Obvious physical strengths and limitations
3. General mannerisms, appearance, etc.

C. Educational Status
1. Present school achievement; kind of work; any samples of work
2. Promotions; accelerations, retardations; causes
3. Relations with individual teachers–present and past
4. Books, etc. used in last educational setting
5. Tests, individual or group, types of measures used

D. Personal Traits
1. Personality–general statement
2. Attitudes toward home, friends, self, family, other students, school
3. Hobbies, play life, leisure time activities
4. Educational and vocational goals
5. Marked likes and dislikes–foods, toys, TV programs, etc.

E. Home and Family
1. Individuals in the home
2. Socioeconomic level
3. Relation with home–favorite brothers/sisters, parent/other relative
4. Regular chores; pets, etc.
5. Home cooperation
6. Record at social agencies

F. Work Experience
1. Part-time jobs (summer, after school)
2. Attitude toward work, etc.

G. Additional Information Needed
1. Sending school
2. Outside agencies
3. Private sources, doctor, mental health center, etc. (need release forms)
4. Health information

Not all of the information needs to be covered verbally. Some of it can be obtained by observation. There is nothing wrong with taking notes during the conference. Other professionals do, and it will show the parents that the teacher considers the information valuable in her work with the child.

Any information regarding physical limitations of the child which would suggest preferential seating or special materials or activities should be noted. Special attention should be paid to past educational experiences of the child, i.e., former teacher reports and observation, any special testing, samples of work, etc. Hobbies, preferred activities, likes and dislikes may furnish the teacher with clues as to potential reinforcers in the classroom, as well as planning programs between school and home. As one explores the family constellations, it is important to find out if there is a language other than English spoken in the home and to what extent it is spoken. If a second language is the predominant language in the home, it could have a pronounced effect on any standardized testing that had been carried out. Questions about socioeconomic level of the family may center around books, magazines, newspapers, radio and TV available to the child and family rather than the level of income. In this instance, the teacher is interested in the supplementary materials available for learning and how the family spends their money rather than the quantity of money available.

Since these conferences are considered information-sharing conferences, the teacher should be prepared to share information that she has available with the parents. Many teachers have found it valuable to prepare a handbook for parents, to be given to parents at the initial meeting. Usually the handbook will include the teacher's name, persons to contact concerning special problems, and a description of the class. The goals and objectives for the students help the parent understand *what* the teacher is trying to accomplish. A description of the structure of the classroom helps the parents understand *how* the teacher is going to accomplish her objectives. Any special procedures should be explained, such as time-out procedures, study carrels, lunch or dismissal that is contingent upon successful completion of work, etc. The fewer surprises that parents have in store for them during the year, the more productive later conferences can be.

Some teachers have found it valuable to include in the handbook sections on tips to parents, activities or management practices. Included might be a suggested list of books which parents might find helpful, such as *Parents Are Teachers* (Becker, 1971); *How To Parent* (Dodson, 1970); *Living with Children: New Methods for Parents & Teachers*

(Patterson & Gullion, 1968); and *You Can Help Your Child Improve Study & Homework Behaviors* (Zifferblatt, 1970). How detailed these sections will be is dependent upon the teacher's knowledge of the parents of the children in her classroom.

The handbook may be very inclusive (general school policies, special community agencies, vacations, dates of regularly scheduled meetings, dates of PTA meetings, special release forms for information and field trips, etc.) or merely a brief description covering the high points. At the very least, it does place something in the parents' hands that demonstrates the teacher's willingness to share as well as receive information.

Grade-Reporting Conferences

Many school districts require conferences at the elementary school level to discuss pupil progress. Usually the time allotment for this type of conference is relatively short, often twenty to thirty minutes. Because of the time limits set for a progress-reporting conference, it is of utmost importance for the teacher to be well prepared. It is seldom the proper time for a problem-solving conference. If a problem-solving conference is indicated, schedule it for a later date, when time is available to explore possible strategies for dealing with the problem.

In preparing for a grade-reporting conference, the teacher should briefly review the period from the past conference to the present one for which she is preparing. Look over the records, graphs, and samples of work that have been accumulated. Select with care specific examples of the child's work to illustrate points that need to be made during the conference. A folder of all the child's work (while of interest to parents) is probably too much for the parents to assimilate in a short conference and may detract from the specific points that the teacher wants to make.

Generally it is best to show areas of growth first and then areas where additional concentration must take place. If one starts with deficiencies, the parents may never "hear" the areas of progress. As the deficient areas are brought up in the conference by the teacher, she should present the plan she has for remediation, i.e., "I'm going to try Julie on the 'Language Master' for the next two weeks to see if it will help her spelling." Secondly, when social behaviors are isolated as target areas it is important to describe them in behavioral terms followed by the intervention program the teacher has prepared. For instance, instead of saying, "Jimmy is out of his seat all of the time," the teacher might say, "Jimmy is out of his seat on the average of ten times an hour. I'm going to show him the graph that I'm keeping and see if he can't try to reduce the number of times during this next week." The behavioral statements provide the parents with specific knowledge and some assurance that the teacher is doing her job in a thoughtful, scientific manner. It may be wise at this point to set a date for a later conference to be conducted by phone or in person. Parents will appreciate some indication in the near future of whether the program outlined by the teacher is successful.

During the grade-reporting conference, it is desirable to elicit from the parents any questions that they would like answered about academic progress. Since special education classes are usually smaller than ordinary ones, there should be more opportunity to provide these parents with a greater amount of information. Daily or weekly progress reports may be helpful. These will be discussed in greater detail in the section on problem-solving conferences.

Group Conferences

During the course of the school year, school personnel have information which can be shared best with parents in a group setting. These meetings should not be construed as group therapy sessions but to impart specific information to parents. Topics for these meetings might include:

1. An orientation to special education.
2. Special testing programs.
3. An explanation of Adjunctive Therapies (physical and occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychological or psychiatric services, social work services, nursing services, etc.).
4. Occupational information (for older children).
5. Behavioral management techniques.
6. Christmas suggestions for special education children.
7. Summer programs available for special education children.
8. Recreational activities, etc.

These meetings should be informative, and some type of handout material should be made available to parents. Usually parents do not come to a meeting prepared to take notes; therefore, having available handouts, pencils, etc. will enhance the possibility of getting the information in the parents' hands.

Probably the best public relations program the school community has at its disposal is a well organized and professionally conducted program of information-sharing conferences. Parents will view them as a joint effort involving the significant adults in their children's lives,

established for the sole purpose of facilitating the education growth of their children. Through careful planning the teacher can make information-sharing conferences an event that the adults look forward to, and these conferences can serve as a firm foundation for conferences which may be regarded as problem-solving.

PROBLEM-SOLVING CONFERENCES

Problem-solving conferences can be an exciting cooperative venture between parents and professionals. Although both sets of individuals may approach the meeting with trepidation, the teacher can do a great deal to set the tone for a productive meeting or series of meetings. There are a number of considerations for the teacher to keep in mind in the successful resolution of what may be considered a problem situation. Some of the points that she might consider are (1) the location of the problem, (2) problem identification and pre-planning, (3) the timing of conferences, (4) the data needs of the parent, (5) the reinforcement needs of parents, and (6) the provision for a demonstration of techniques.

Who Has the Problem?

If one adheres to an environmentalist point of view which implies that the environment controls the behavior of an individual, then it is conceivable that the behavior emitted by the child in the classroom may be different than his behavior at home. Parents sometimes are surprised that their son, who will not pick up his clothes at home, offered to straighten the chairs in the classroom. The teacher who has a problem settling the class to practice for the all-school program is often pleased to see the event go smoothly. Therefore, when the teacher perceives a problem of either social or academic behavior, she should not assume that the same problem occurs in the home. When the teacher informs the parents that their child is acting out in the classroom, one should not be surprised if the parents regard the deviant behavior as the teacher's problem—because essentially it is.

When a behavioral problem occurs at school which the teacher has not been able to successfully cope with using traditional methods, the purpose of a parent-teacher conference may be to define the type and magnitude of the problem and to solicit help from the parents in the solution of the problem. It would be incorrect to assume that the behavior occurs with equal magnitude across environments or that it is caused by the parents. The teacher should be prepared to describe the problem with concrete data, to solicit suggestions from the parents for control techniques, and to outline a program that may require parental support or involvement.

Problem Identification and Pre-planning

Often during the course of the school year there are a select number of students who display excesses or deficits of behavior and who have not responded to conventional approaches of behavior modification. In addition, quite often each of the pupils has a number of behaviors which need specific attention.

If the parents are to be involved in an intervention program, the following steps should facilitate the conference:

1. Select the behaviors that are of concern by listing a number of observable behaviors or having the child select his own targets (Kroth, 1972).
2. Define the behaviors in observable terms so that they can be accurately measured.
3. Rank the behaviors according to priority. It is usually advantageous to rank academic behaviors ahead of social behaviors, because the successful modification of a deficiency in academics will often alleviate excessive social behaviors.
4. From the priority ranked list of behaviors, put a P (for parent) next to those you want to work on with the parents and a T (for teacher) next to those you feel you need to work on alone.
5. Keep an accurate record of the frequency, percent, duration of rate of occurence of the selected benavior(s) for a week.
6. Graph the data which have been collected to have a visual record to present to the parents.
7. Prepare an outline of a plan for intervention of what you are to do and what the parents are to do. This plan, of course, is subject to change depending upon what the parents can do or are willing to do.

The care that is taken by the teacher in identifying the problems that she feels are solvable through joint action can reduce the amount of random activity surrounding the parent-teacher conference. The specificity of the behavior in terms of frequency, etc., and the preparation of a graphic presentation indicates to the parents that the teacher has taken a methodical approach to the problem and, therefore, the foundation is established for a systematic remediation program.

Timing Conferences

The parents of exceptional children, particularly those whose children have been identified as emotionally disturbed or learning disabled, often have had conferences

with school personnel dealing with problematic situations. In some instances, the major contacts between educators and parents have been traumatic. In order to set the stage for a positive working relationship, holding conferences prior to entry as suggested by Duncan and Fitzgerald (1969) seems desirable.

The timing of conferences can be crucial to the working relationship between parents and educator. If the teacher is attempting to work with the parents on a specific behavior, it is usually desirable to have regularly scheduled conferences as close as a week apart. The first or second conference can be used to identify the specific target or behavior and to develop techniques for measuring the behavior. When a baseline has been established, the teacher can begin to develop, with the parents' input, the type of consequences that will be effective to change the behavior. The regularly scheduled conferences provide the teacher with opportunities for careful monitoring of the procedures and give the teacher an opportunity to reinforce the parents at regularly scheduled intervals (fixed interval schedule) which should insure the building of the new behavior on the part of both child and parent. As the new behavior becomes established, the teacher and parent may make conferences further apart.

Another advantage of having regularly scheduled conferences is to eliminate the "crisis conference." From a behavioral point of view, holding a conference immediately following a crisis may reinforce crisis type behavior on the part of the pupil. In a classroom at the Children's Rehabilitation Unit (CRU) at the University of Kansas, a particular boy was being sent home on the average of once every two weeks for extremely disruptive behavior. There was usually a conference with the parents to discuss the event and to make plans to deal with the behavior. On occasion, both parents and teacher expressed dissatisfaction with the conferences. It was decided to hold regularly scheduled conferences instead of scheduling around an event. During these conferences, methods for handling excessive behavior at school and at home were discussed. Because children in the classroom were programmed for high degrees of success, both academically and socially, most of the discussions in the conferences centered around how well the boy was doing and the improvement (shown graphically) that he was making from day to day. The conferences became more pleasant and profitable. It was observed that there were considerably fewer disruptive episodes that resulted in the boy's being sent home before the end of the day. The parents and the teacher became a team with a common goal, and the boy could no longer enjoy the occurrences of parents and teacher in conflict. A greater consistency between management procedures at home and school resulted in a greater consistency in productive behavior at school during the ensuing months.

Another consideration in the timing of the conferences should be the time of day for the conference. If the purpose of the conference is merely to share data and consider slight modification procedures, then an open-ended time slot may hinder that objective. One set of parents tended to take every conference as an opportunity to discuss the other children in the family as well as the boy in the special class. While a discussion of the family dynamics was deemed desirable, the proper time for this was considered to be at a regularly scheduled group meeting of parents which was conducted by a social worker. In order to facilitate the data-sharing conference, it was decided to hold the conference thirty minutes before school began in the morning. The father needed to go on to work, and the teacher needed to go to class. Business was conducted in a precise and orderly fashion, and both teacher and parents were pleased with the progress.

One should consider the potentially positive effects of setting a limit on the number of conferences in a series. Various therapists have experimented with setting temporary termination dates to increase the pressure on the patient to take over his own management (Alexander & Selesnick, 1966; Shlien, Mosak, & Dreikurs, 1962). In establishing a rationale for the structure Shlien, Mosak, & Dreikurs (1962) say:

> In essence, the theory is that time limits place the emphasis where it belongs, on quality and process, rather than on quantity. Times does not heal because it cannot; only activity can heal; and the more activity, the shorter time required. This theory holds that limits, in effect, increase energy, choice, wisdom, and courage, and so they heighten the essential process while they reduce the largely unessential time. (p. 31)

Parents Need Data

Teachers sometimes comment on the ineffectiveness of report cards as behavior change agents. They point out the similarity of the grade point average from one marking period to the next.

One of the problems with the use of grade cards as modifiers is the long time span between the issuances of the reporting forms. In a sense, this strategy of reporting to parents may be considered as a fixed interval of reinforcement. In an attempt to alter the observed pattern of behavior associated with traditional home-school reports, various investigators have experimented with daily report card systems (Edlund, 1967; Fuller, 1971; Kroth, Whelan, and Stables, 1970; Simonson, 1972).

Edlund (1969) described, in some detail, procedures for setting up a daily home-school communication list. Usually the teacher and parents establish in a conference a set number of social and academic behaviors to be communicated on a daily basis. They establish the nature of the symbols (percentages, check marks, Smiling Sams, letter grades) that will be recorded on a form, signed by the teacher, and conveyed by the child. In order to insure that the cards are received at home, a system (phone calls or consequences) is established to ensure that the card is brought home. At this point, teacher and parents usually agree on some reward system to be administered at home for improved performances at school.

When the school personnel informs parents of a problem relating to an excess or deficit of behavior on their child's part, some action will probably take place. This is often true even when teachers tell the parents not to concern themselves with the particular problem. For example, in the early grades, parents may be informed that their child is having problems with reading and at the same time are instructed not to do anything about it. Rare are the parents who can ignore a problem involving their child. When a problem area has been pinpointed, it is often far better to include the parents in plans for remediation. In the daily data system, they are provided with an active role. They can become a positive reinforcer for the child's growth. They have a specific plan of action and a key role, whereas if they are left alone they may punish the child or require long hours of nonproductive study time.

Edlund (1969) points out that "it is far more effective to arrange for teachers and parents to become directly involved in managing the child's behavioral learning progress than to simply tell them how behavior is learned" (p. 127). In order to effect change in the classroom, though, parents need data. They cannot rely on the child's verbal report.

Parents Need Reinforcement

Improved study habits, academic behavior, and social behavior on the part of the child are usually contingent upon reinforcement from parents. The parents must alter their schedule in such a way to insure that consistent rewards follow improved behavior. What guarantees that the parents will continue to maintain these new behavioral patterns after the initial program has been laid out?

Edlund (1969) states, "When a teacher or a parent rewards a child's desirable behavior, and that behavior is maintained, the teacher or the parent is, in turn, rewarded" (p. 127). While it is possible that behavioral change on the part of the child will be rewarding enough to maintain the reorganized patterns of behavior by parents, it is also a distinct possibility that the parents will revert to old familiar patterns of behavior when it appears that their problem has been solved. Adults have reinforcing events in their own world which may be incompatible with dispensing rewards to their child and providing the structure that is indicated. The cocktail hour, the bridge club, TV programs, or a good book may compete with listening to a child read, watching a child's graph go up, and providing milk and cookies after study time. In fact, the reordering of priorities may occur quite quickly as the child shows progress.

The teacher is probably well advised to provide some sort of systematic reinforcement to parents for successfully carrying out a planned program. The most common forms of providing reinforcement are letters and phone calls. However, some innovative teachers take the common approaches and make them unusual. One of the teachers in the Curriculum of Positive Emphasis (COPE) project in the Lincoln, Nebraska Public Schools had a child in a class for behaviorally disturbed children who successfully completed a difficult project. Rather than send a note or call the parents herself, she took the boy to the principal's office with the completed project and asked the principal to call the mother and inform the mother of her son's accomplishment. This procedure was extremely reinforcing to the parents, the child, and the administration. It also served to establish a different relationship between school and home. Often the contacts between school administrators and the parents of children who exhibit behavioral disorders have been precipitated by a crisis. As a result, calls to parents by school personnel may set up negative expectations on the part of parents.

Most parents never receive any personal communication from school other than notices of PTA meetings, quarterly report cards, occasional notices of pending failure or broken rules (smoking, tardiness, etc.) or a call from the nurse if the child is absent. The provision of data such as that mentioned earlier somewhat alleviates the communication void, but it does not solve the need for reinforcement for carrying out a planned program. Nielsen (1972) conducted a study to examine the effects of positive reinforcement on parents of behaviorally disturbed children. Twenty-three students and their parents were selected for the investigation. These children were divided into four groups. The parents of two of the groups were provided with academic activities in spelling and math to aid their children. The parents of the other two groups were provided with recommended games to improve their

children's social behavior. One set of parents in each major group (academic and social) was reinforced periodically by notes, phone calls, and home visits for their children's academic achievement or for playing games with their children. Daily recording of scores in spelling and math and the pre and post scores on the Peterson and Quay Modified Behavior Checklist were used as measuring instruments. The pupils' teachers were the sources for the academic data and the behavioral ratings, and they were uninformed as to which of the parents were being reinforced.

The results of the study were as follows:

1. All six of the children whose parents were reinforced for playing games had improved behavioral rating scores, while only two of the five whose parents were not reinforced improved.
2. All six of the children whose parents were reinforced for academic assistance showed gain in both academic areas with the exception of one child who gained in spelling and maintained his math average. By contrast, only one child in the nonreinforced group improved in both spelling and math. One child decreased in both areas, while the other four children showed an increase in one area and a decrease in the other or maintained the same level.

Nielsen (1972) concluded that:

> When targets are clearly specified and the parents are reinforced for working with their children, change takes place. It is not enough merely to identify a deficit and assume that parents will alter their methods of assisting their children at home. Parents, like children, need specific instruction and reinforcement for carrying out these planned programs. Furthermore, the present study indicates that notifying parents of their child's deficits and the failing to provide feedback may actually increase academic and behavioral problems. (p. 36)

To say that parents "ought to want" to change is an irrational idea. Learning to be a reinforcing parent is hard work. As such, it is necessary to provide parents with praise, letters, approval, and other signs of recognition for improved performance. Being a parent, like being a teacher, is a lonely profession. Approval for another significant adult can be highly rewarding.

Parents May Need a Demonstration

One does not learn to be a teacher by reading a book or by attending a series of lectures. Although a teacher can pick up some valuable ideas through these methods, usually the teacher is required to go through some form of internship. First there is the observation of children, then the observation of a master teacher, then teaching under supervision and finally the opportunity to teach alone. Obviously, during this process there is a certain amount of modeling behavior. When situations arise, the cadet teacher tends to try to respond as she saw the master teacher respond.

Parents, on the other hand, do not have the benefits of an internship. Even if they use their own parents as models, the advent of an exceptional child leaves them somewhat unprepared. Therapists with various philosophical orientations have advocated the use of parents in the treatment of children and have included them in the therapy sessions (Guerney, 1969). In some instances the parents act as passive observers, while, in other instances, therapists encourage the parent to take over the role of "teacher" under guidance.

Guerney (1969) reported a technique called *filial therapy* in which groups of parents of exceptional children are taught to conduct play sessions through a series of meetings. The beginning sessions are somewhat didactic, leading to an observation of other parents working with their children; then the parents conduct a play session with a child under supervision before they attempt the same procedures at home. The second stage involves having the parents use the techniques at home while having weekly discussion sessions with the group leaders. The final stage is concerned with phasing the parents out of the original parents group as their children reach levels of competence and obtain feelings of confidence.

A similar strategy of taking parents through a step-by-step procedure was used by Russo (1964), except that the skills which the parents learned were based on a behavior modification orientation rather than the Rogerian client-centered orientation. Through a shaping process, the mother observed the therapist interacting with her child; then a three-way interaction evolved, and finally the therapist began to withdraw from active participation in the sessions. A brief conference was held after each session to discuss the progress of the behavioral therapy, and an opportunity was provided for the therapist to reinforce the parent immediately for appropriate behavior.

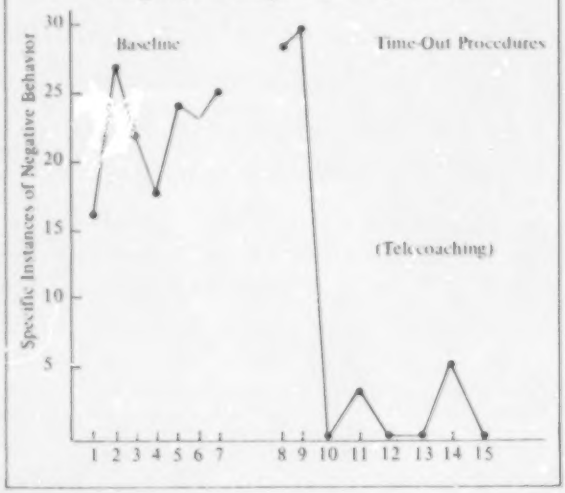
Straughan (1964) reported a similar study in which the mother observed a therapist working with her child and was then phased into the therapist's role. The mother was reinforced for appropriate behavioral responses and inappropriate responses were ignored. Only five sessions were needed to bring about change in the mother-child relationship.

Not all parents need to go through the process described, and yet the opportunity for providing such a training session should be available to parents. The

following case study reported by Simpson (1971) illustrates the point:

> A six year old boy, F, was referred to the CRU for a comprehensive evaluation to determine his functional levels and educational placement possibilities. Along with specific recommendations for educational placement and program, a behavior modification program was recommended to be carried out in the home by the parents to deal with F's negativism. F was described as "headstrong" and "set in his ways."
>
> Negative behavior was operationally defined, and an event-recording procedure was employed to measure the target daily. The procedures were to be carried out in the home. The baseline data was found to be fairly stable, although slightly ascending, with a median occurrence of 23 events a day (see Figure 2). Basic learning theory procedures were explained to the parents, and a two-point program was agreed upon. The parents were to ignore oppositional behavior while rewarding cooperative behavior, and they were to isolate F for 5 minutes following each instance of oppositional behavior.
>
> Oppositional benavior increased for the first two days of the modification program, and the mother reported that F was "uncontrollable." It became almost impossible physically to place F in the time-out room; and while he was there, he was destructive. F and his mother returned to the CRU and a telecoaching device was used whereby the mother wore an ear plug attached to a transistor radio. The teacher stood on one side of a one-way mirror and told the mother specifically when to reinforce, ignore and implement time-out procedures. After a single session, the mother implemented the procedure at home; and the median number of oppositional incidents was reduced to two.
>
> A follow-up conference with the mother a year later indicated that F was maintaining appropriate behavior and that the mother felt comfortable with the procedures, using them when needed.

Figure 2
Modification of Negative Behavior
Using Telecoaching & Time-Out Procedures



Fortunately, in the preceding case, the mother called the teacher immediately to let her know the process was not working. One wonders how often parents leave the training session, try out the recommendations at home, find them ineffective, drop them without informing the teacher, and allow the teacher to think that the program was highly effective and to be recommended to the next set of parents.

Sometimes the language which is so familiar to the teacher is unfamiliar to parents. Instructions that seem clear are misinterpreted. The writer remembers one instance in which a parent was told to pinpoint a target and return with a graph a week later. The parent came back with a graph with seven pins stuck on it. Perhaps a demonstration of the instructions would have helped.

Summary

The education of exceptional children is an exciting task. The teacher who accepts this responsibility should be well trained in programming for the special needs of her children and knowledgeable in special techniques for modifying behaviors. One area of her training that is sometimes neglected is the acquisition of specialized knowledge pertaining to working with parents.

Parents must be recognized as a powerful force in the success of any education program for children. Through their joint efforts, parents have been influential in gaining national, state, and local legislation in support of special education. Individually, they have contributed to or hindered the progress of their children in the classroom. Teachers who have recognized that parents are educators have found that well-planned conferences serve to facilitate the educational process.

Of the two major types of conferences outlined above, information-sharing conferences are the backbone of the home-school relationships. Initial efforts to establish a procedure for sharing knowledge sets the stage for further problem-solving situations. Teachers who are open about what goes on in their classroom and who share their techniques for change with parents will find it easier to gain information from parents that will help in the education of children. Parents have a right to know what the teacher knows about their children, and the teacher has an obligation to prepare the information in a manner that

insures understanding. If this relationship is properly established, then problem-solving conferences become less traumatic and may be regarded as a joint effort rather than a conflict between what is and what should be in the eyes of the perceiver.

1. It is important in problem-solving conferences to decide who has the problem. Does the discrepancy between the "real" and "ideal" exist both in the classroom and the home, or is it strictly a school problem in which the parents' assistance is requested?

2. The teacher's skill in defining the problem in behavioral terms and preparing information to communicate to parents demonstrates the professional level of the teacher.

3. The teacher needs to consider the timing of the conferences. When conferences are held, the number and the length of the conferences play a part in the success or failure of the problem-solving process.

4. If parents are to become actively involved in the solution of a problem that is school based, then they need data to respond to in order to carry out their part of the program. Plans should be made to supply them with information or feedback from the classroom systematically.

5. Parents need to be reinforced for carrying out a home-school program. Although the area of parents programs has scarcely been researched, the evidence that exists suggests it is very important and should not be neglected.

6. To assume that parents understand their part of the problem-solving venture after a brief conference may be to assume too much. Occasionally, it is helpful to "walk parents through" a process. We all learn by having products and activities demonstrated to us. Industry considers it good salesmanship to show how a process works and education should consider the importance of using demonstrations when working with parents.

The education of children is a full-time job. To neglect the home environment and the influential effects of parents is unprofessional. The assumption that parents do not care is unwarranted. The successful special education teacher is "special" because she uses all resources available to facilitate the educational progress of her children.

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